

# Sight & Sound

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE



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## GARY OLDMAN IS SMILEY IN TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY

EVERY NEW  
**FILM**  
REVIEWED

**PLUS** The 'Melancholia' confessions of Lars von Trier | Ken Loach: the social navigator | Nicolas Winding Refn's violent 'Drive' | Greek cinema's indescribable 'Attenberg' | A 'Jane Eyre' for austere times | Mark Cousins's globetrotting 'The Story of Film'

# A SONG SKIN S FILM



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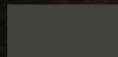
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# Sight & Sound

October 2011

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## Editorial enquiries

21 Stephen Street London W1T 1LN

t: 020 7255 1444

f: 020 7436 2327

w: bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

e: S&S@bfi.org.uk

## Social media

f: facebook.com/SightSoundmag

t: twitter.com/SightSoundmag

## Subscriptions

t: 020 8955 7070

e: sightandsound@alliance-media.co.uk

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Michael Atkinson**'s books include 'Ghosts in the Machine: The Dark Heart of Pop Cinema' and 'Flickpedia', co-written with Laurel Shifrin

**Michael Brooke** is a freelance writer and film historian, and the co-producer of the BFI's recent restoration of Jan Svankmajer's 'Alice'

**Ian Christie** is a critic, curator and film historian who teaches at Birkbeck College, and author of the 'The Art of Film: John Box and Production Design'

**Charles Gant** is film editor at 'Heat' magazine

**John Hill** is Professor of Media at Royal Holloway, University of London, and author of 'Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television'

**Philip Kemp** is a freelance writer and film historian

**Tim Lucas** is the editor of 'Video Watchdog' and the author of 'Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark'

**Geoffrey Macnab**'s most recent book is 'Screen Epiphanies'

**Claire Monk** is senior lecturer in film studies at De Montfort University

**Nick Pinkerton** is a freelance writer and regular contributor to 'The Village Voice'

**Nick Roddick** is the author of several books on cinema

**Jonathan Romney** is the film critic at 'The Independent on Sunday'

**Patrick Russell** is Senior Curator of Non-Fiction at the BFI

**Paul Ryan** is the author of 'Never Apologise: the Collected Writings of Lindsay Anderson' and 'Marlon Brando: A Portrait'

**John Sutherland** is Lord Northcliffe Professor Emeritus of Modern English Literature at UCL

**Amy Taubin** is a contributing editor to 'Film Comment' and 'Sight & Sound', and author of the BFI Film Classic on 'Taxi Driver'

**Peter Tonguetto** is the author of 'The Films of James Bridges'

## COVER

Gary Oldman in 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy'  
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Next issue  
on sale  
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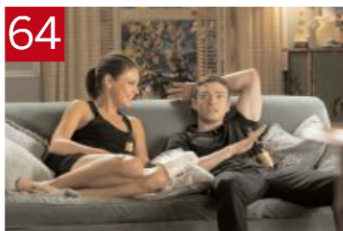


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**Welcome.** You could say we're scandalously clad this month. Our cover feature explores Swedish director Tomas Alfredson's new film version of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (p.16) with Gary Oldman (left, and p.18), who we interview. We also talk to Denmark's Lars von Trier (far left, and p.30), who is typically candid about his film *Melancholia* and his infamous Cannes 'Nazi' outburst. And then there's fellow Dane Nicolas Winding Refn's first Hollywood feature *Drive* (p.46), to complete the feeling that Nords are umbilical to cinema. However, the 'guvnor' of them all, as far as we're concerned, is the great Brit Ken Loach, whose lesser- and never-seen films we remember here (p.24), alongside tributes from fellow filmmakers. There's also a fine enigmatic Greek film, *Attenberg* (p.40), an unexpectedly fresh *Jane Eyre* (p.44) and the eye-opening 15-hour *The Story of Film* (p.36) from our very own Mark Cousins. ➡ **Nick James**

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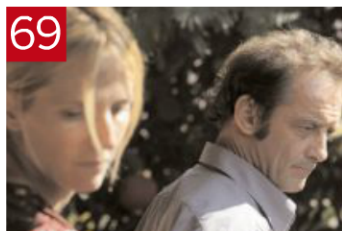
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**AND ONLINE THIS MONTH** BFI London Film Festival preview | Venice and Toronto blogs | Video: Edward Yang in clips | Post Mortem's Pablo Larraín and more [www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)



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# NICK JAMES NOT THE SILLY SEASON



The recent BBC drama series *The Hour* was designed to run through the summer, when much of the TV audience take their holidays – and when, almost by convention, not too much that's important or distracting

happens. This may account for its sitcom-like trailer campaign and its eventual refusal to be more than superficially serious about its political content. Despite these weaknesses and the unexpectedly dramatic real news events that dominated television during its run (of which more later), I watched it all, right up to the ramshackle last episode.

It had its attractions. Leads Romola Garai, Dominic West and Ben Whishaw enjoyed playing off the camp aspects of the 1950s early days of BBC news commentary television. The mystery at its heart was tantalising, and effectively put in jeopardy everyone the viewer was meant to like. The threat emanated from government control of the media: ministers strong-armed BBC controllers, MI6 men snooped around the corridors looking for a Russian 'mole'. The series climaxed with the team sneaking out news items critical of Anthony Eden's government during the Suez crisis. As such it represents the TV producers' ultimate wet dream of being able to do what's best for their show without the controllers making you re-edit.

But *The Hour's* insistence on being silly-season light also made it a truly stark contrast to the real news. The most vivid moving-image footage I saw during the same period was on the BBC news channel. The Croydon furniture store set fire to by looters was being filmed live from a helicopter. It went up so fast in such a huge conflagration that I was transfixed. What was extraordinary about this helicopter view, which played uncut while it was actually happening for what seemed like 20 minutes, was how unmediated it felt. This, of course, is the illusion that live rolling news wants to create, of being there, watching unsafe things from the safety of your armchair. But watching the actual live footage while fearing that something similar might be breaking out close to where you are sitting gives you a sense of helpless fascination.

The only useful thing about that feeling is that it breaks the sense of 'them and us' – for once we in the West get a jolt of the fear that, say, Libyan

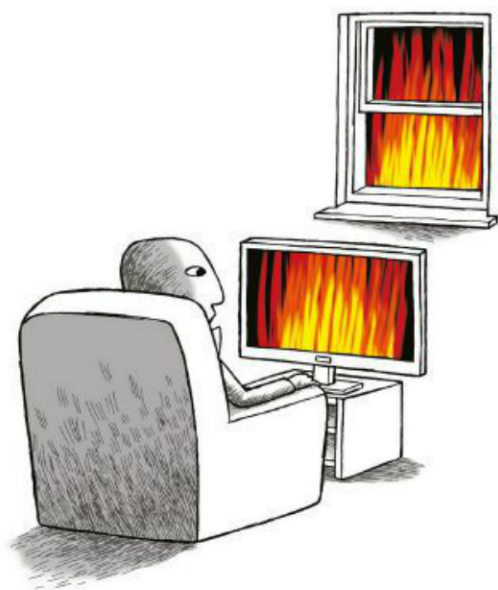
families have been experiencing daily (and of course there are real victims here as well as there). But what contributed to the unease was the sense that those behind the rolling news were themselves transfixed. Showing the fire without much of a framing context seemed at the time as if it might encourage kids to do more damage. But the moment you think like that, you've lost touch with what you'd think in more rational, less fearful moments. You feel helpless, so you want someone – anyone – to be in control.

And that yearning for authority presents a dilemma for the BBC. Just when the corporation might be feeling some sense of relief at the problems besetting their principal antagonist – James Murdoch of BSkyB and News International, who argued in 2009 for its severe reduction – along comes a national mood that might give the prime minister the public backing to pursue that aim without Murdoch. BBC Director General Mark Thompson has sniffed this danger. "Whatever

**Watching the live footage while fearing that something similar might be breaking out close to where you are sitting gives you a sense of helpless fascination**

topic you touch on..." he says in *The Guardian* ([www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/aug/24/james-murdoch-wrong-on-bbc](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/aug/24/james-murdoch-wrong-on-bbc)), "there is a palpable hunger for a return... to a practical, dependable, shared morality... Can anyone seriously argue that it doesn't apply to the media industry as well?" He then argues valiantly for the relative smallness of the BBC in comparison to BSkyB, before concluding: "The only reliable, durable and perpetual guarantor of independence is not profit [as James Murdoch has been arguing]. Nor who you know... It's integrity."

But it's on the issue of integrity that coverage of the riots on the BBC's *Newsnight* has been criticised. *The Observer* accused it of "staging sterile, phoney confrontations" and "trotting out the usual cast of opinionated fools". It seems that between *The Hour's* idealists trying to smuggle criticism into official 1950s BBC coverage in a drama that doesn't take its own politics seriously, and this feeling that the breaking-news media is a gawper as helpless as we are ourselves to affect politics, the BBC will do well to live up to Thompson's high principle.



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## EDITORIAL

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**Credits supervisor**  
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**Contributing editors**  
J. Hoberman, Mark Kermode,  
Geoffrey Macnab,  
Kim Newman, Tony Rayns,  
Jonathan Romney,  
Mark Sinker, Amy Taubin  
**Design and art direction**  
chrisbrawdendesign.com  
**Origination**  
Liam West at Masterpiece  
**Printer**  
Wyndham Group

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# Rushes

News, opinion, festivals and coming events

## THE BIGGER PICTURE



## In her stride

Rachel Weisz is a glamorous bestriding presence at this year's BFI London Film Festival. The British actress stars in both the opening-night film, Fernando Meirelles's '360', and the closing-night offering, Terence Davies's eagerly awaited adaptation of Terence Rattigan's play 'The Deep Blue Sea' (pictured above).

In between those bookends, the festival looks set to offer the usual mix of traffic-stopping galas (highlights include David Cronenberg's 'A Dangerous Method', Lynne Ramsay's

'We Need to Talk About Kevin' and Steve McQueen's 'Shame'), choice selections of new experimental work (including Ben Rivers's 'Two Years at Sea') and treasures from the archives, plus the best in recent cinema from around the world, including the Dardenne brothers' latest feature 'The Kid with a Bike' (right), which we at 'Sight & Sound' are delighted to present as our special screening.

The 55th BFI London Film Festival, in partnership with American Express, runs from 12 to 27 October



# Questions of identity

*Céline Sciamma talks to Philip Kemp about 'Tomboy', her follow-up to 'Water Lilies'*

"Terrific poise and the crispest, cleanest cinematography imaginable" was Peter Bradshaw's comment on *Water Lilies* (*Naissance des pieuvres*, 2007), Céline Sciamma's award-winning debut feature. The same could be said of her follow-up *Tomboy*, in which she once again demonstrates an exceptional knack for drawing assured, unmannered performances from a young cast. *Water Lilies* – which charted the erotic tensions and rivalries of three 15-year-old members of a synchronised-swimming team in a school on the outskirts of Paris – deployed an intimacy of gaze that avoided any hint of prurience.

Set in a similar outer-Parisian environment, *Tomboy* drops a few years in age. Ten-year-old Laure (Zoé Héran) has just moved with her parents and younger sister to a flat in a housing development. Her parents are affectionate but preoccupied – her father with his work, her mother with the imminent arrival of a baby boy. Exploring her new territory, she meets Lisa, a girl her own age, who takes the short-haired, androgynous Laure for a boy; and Laure, on an impulse, reinvents herself as Michaël, an identity unhesitatingly accepted by the local kids. It's clear that the deception can't last – apart from anything else, Laure/Michaël will soon have to be enrolled in school – but in the meantime she finds herself revelling in her new boyish persona, while Lisa starts becoming attracted to her 'male' friend.

Though it betrays not the least sign of corners having been cut, *Tomboy* was conceived and shot with astonishing speed on a frugal budget. "I first had the idea for it in March [2010]," says Sciamma. "I wrote it in April in three weeks, I did the casting in three weeks, and then we shot it in August in 20 days. Two main sets, 50 sequences, and the whole crew was just 12 people. It went with this crazy energy. I wanted to do it that way, to go against all the folklore that says a second feature must have a bigger budget. I wanted to try different things and be even freer than I was with the first movie.

"Also I felt this energy of production was totally in phase with the subject of childhood, so that making the movie was like a game," she continues. "Working with children, you have to go fast,



**'I met Zoé [Héran] – and even though she had long hair and was dressed as a girl, I knew she was right. She had the look'**

otherwise they get bored and tired. So I wanted the film to have this energy, this joy in role-playing – and the energy helped me to make it look stylish. I love coming-of-age stories. They make for a strong plot, driven characters – and give you a point of view on a sensitive subject."

Casting was crucial – perhaps even more so than in most films. "That was the biggest challenge, and I only had three weeks to do it," Sciamma recalls. "My natural instinct would be to go to schools or out on the street to find the perfect little girl, but there was no time for that, so I went to an agency. I wasn't really happy with that – the kids tend to have this constructed look. But on the very first day of casting I met Zoé [Héran] – and even though she had long hair and was dressed as a girl, I knew she was just right. She had the look and the androgyny, the face and the body, but also she could perform. It was a job for an actress, and she had the will to do it. She had a strong will to work, and for a child that's rare."

It's a major strength of the film that Sciamma omits the explanatory, pointing-the-moral speeches that the story might easily invite. "It doesn't tell much in words – I was always thinking of it as an action movie," she explains. "It's not about 'why is she doing this?' – it's about 'how is she doing this?' That way it's open to a wider audience. Some people might

think it's the start of a radical journey to identity, and others that it's just something that happened that summer and won't happen again. It's a particular story, but at the same time it's about childhood and how as a child you're always pretending and role-playing. I love exploring this question of identity."

The film skilfully balances poignancy and humour. "In my first movie," Sciamma recalls, "I tried for more humorous situations, but I had to cut a lot of them in the editing, because teenagehood is such an intense mood. But with childhood you can have these contrasts – you can go from crying to laughing in a moment." She cites a scene where Laure, to give herself the right profile in swimming trunks, constructs a penis out of Play-Doh. "I love to play with scenes that are at once funny and awkward."

Sciamma's future plans are moving towards a TV series. She feels it's "something we're not really good at in France", though recent international acclaim for *Spiral* (*Engrenages*) suggests things may be improving in that regard. "I'd love to follow characters for ten hours, rather than just an hour and a half," she says. On the evidence so far, it should be well worth looking out for.

■ *'Tomboy' is released in the UK on 16 September, and is reviewed on page 79*

● Paul Greengrass is being tipped to direct an adaptation of Robert Harris's upcoming novel 'The Fear Index', about a physicist who "invents a computer capable of predicting human mood swings", which he uses to earn a fortune on the global markets. Then one night an intruder breaks into his house and threatens to sabotage the machine just as the markets are facing a crash. The rumour follows the collapse of Greengrass's Martin Luther King film 'Memphis'. Greengrass is also rumoured to be considering 'Maersk Alabama', with Tom Hanks lined up to star.

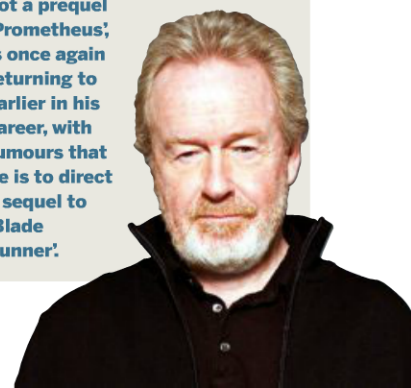
● Abdellatif Kechiche, the director of 'Couscous' and 'Black Venus', is to adapt 'La Blessure la vraie', a memoir set in the summer of 1986 by François Bégaudeau, writer and star of Laurent Cantet's 'The Class'.

● Barry Levinson is to direct 'The Day the Laughter Stopped', about the life of Fatty Arbuckle, who was famously accused of raping actress Virginia Rappe at a Hollywood party in 1921, after which she died of complications resulting from a ruptured bladder. Arbuckle faced trial by press in William Randolph Hearst's papers, and though he was acquitted after much of the evidence against him was found to be smears, his reputation never recovered. Eric Stonestreet is set to play Arbuckle.

● Steve McQueen, whose Michael Fassbender-starring sex-addiction drama 'Shame' premiered at this year's Venice Film Festival, is to follow that with '12 Years a Slave', which tells the true story of Solomon Northup, a New York citizen who was kidnapped in 1841 and rescued from a Louisiana plantation in 1853. Chiwetel Ejiofor is set to star.

● Baltasar Kormakur, the Icelandic director of 'Jar City' and 'The Deep', is to direct a \$60 million epic Viking adventure story, titled 'Vikings'. Working Title are helping to develop and produce the project.

● Ridley Scott (right), following the upcoming 'Alien' prequel/not a prequel 'Prometheus', is once again returning to earlier in his career, with rumours that he is to direct a sequel to 'Blade Runner'.



# Bonfire of the DVDs

Arthouse distributors are counting the cost of the Enfield fire. By **Geoffrey Macnab**

No, Steve Lewis (home entertainment manager at Artificial Eye) didn't go to see the smouldering remains of the Sony DADC warehouse that burned down on the night of 8/9 August during the London riots. "There was probably not an awful lot to see other than a lot of melted arthouse videos," he reflects ruefully.

The fire is estimated to have caused the destruction of 25 million DVDs. (The BFI was among those affected, losing an estimated 125,000 units.) Initially, as news of the fire spread, the Blitz spirit was much in evidence, with distributors putting a brave face on their loss. Their masters would have been stored elsewhere and Sony – who also manufactured many of the DVDs – swooped into action, promising to replace stock, speed up shipping and establish a new distribution centre. The DVDs were replaceable and Sony was insured.

However, it also quickly became clear that it will take many months for the supplies to be replenished. Days after the fire, Sony confirmed that it would be remanufacturing 1.5 million discs – a huge number in itself, but only a fraction of the copies that were actually lost.



Inferno: the fire at the Sony DADC warehouse in August destroyed 25 million DVDs

"The entire process of replacing everything in the catalogue is going to take a while," Lewis acknowledges. "Although Sony has reacted very, very quickly, they just have a huge logistical challenge. Considering they lost 25 million units altogether, that's an awful lot of titles across an awful lot of distributors. Even with them working flat out, it is going to take a degree of time to replace all those 'deep catalogue' titles." (Sony pointed out that they weren't the only manufacturers making the DVDs.)

As stocks ran down, distributors fretting about cash flow were faced with a grim scenario in which (in the short term) they couldn't meet the

demands of would-be customers. That meant their films would slip down the bestseller charts, and that the big retailers would in turn cut down on future orders.

Fears have been raised that smaller distributors who have released films in 'minimum runs' of (say) 500 copies will not renew the DVDs. Artificial Eye has a library of in excess of 300 titles. While Lewis says that there are no immediate plans to delete any of these, he acknowledges that the most popular titles will be replicated first. The slower-selling 'deep catalogue lines' will take longer to be replaced (if, indeed, they all are). Films coming to the end of their

licence period that are not big sellers might simply now be deleted.

As Andy Whittaker – founder of Dogwoof, one of the companies affected – explains, some smaller distributors won't continue to sell all the titles lost in the blaze. By the time the insurance pays up, it won't be worth the time and effort to re-licence 'long tail' titles that may only sell a handful of copies a week. Dogwoof has already decided not to renew such older titles as *EMR*, *Buy It Now*, *Viva Zapatero* and *Ahlaam*, though these may still be available to be downloaded. "What we're looking at is accelerating what we're doing online, as opposed to trying to replicate them on DVD," he says.

But Mehelli Modi, founder of Second Run, takes a different view: "For us, it's a different thing. Our business is catalogue. Our films are films we love from the past that we want you to see. Our view is: nothing gets deleted."

Ironically, what the Enfield warehouse fire has underlined is the importance of the UK DVD market. For several years now, industry observers have been predicting that DVD would soon be in its death throes as distributors embraced online delivery models. But as Andy Whittaker puts it, "This event has been eye-opening [about] the resilience of DVD and its revenue."

## THE NUMBERS

# The key to the market

Kristin Scott Thomas's bankability is shown by 'Sarah's Key'. By **Charles Gant**

The arthouse market is always open to a film from an unknown director with unfamiliar actors, as long as the planets are extraordinarily aligned: major acclaim from critics and festivals bestowing must-see status. But that occurs only rarely. Most successful arthouse releases depend, just like their more mainstream counterparts, on familiar elements.

Now aged 51, Kristin Scott Thomas has emerged over the past few years as an increasingly reliable arthouse brand, with her appearances in French-language films often seen as a reassuring marker for fans of upscale cinema. A case in point is current release *Sarah's Key*, not necessarily the easiest sell, with its Holocaust theme

(France's collaboration in the deporting of Jews in World War II) and little-known director (Gilles Paquet-Brenner). While Tatiana de Rosnay's source novel enjoys a profile in France, that was hardly the case here.

At the UK's StudioCanal (formerly Optimum), distribution boss John Trafford-Owen agrees that it was Scott Thomas who provided the film's strongest marketable element. "She's emerging as a bankable star in upscale films and really proving herself in French-language titles," he says. The distributor was also confident that audiences, more than critics, would respond to the human story. "It's a highly relatable tale about how you would deal with the discovery of your family's possible implication in a terrible injustice," says Trafford-Owen. "We knew the film would play well to an upscale

arthouse independent audience, even if reviews were not generally more than three stars [out of five]."

For release, StudioCanal chose an opening pattern very similar to Scott Thomas's biggest French-language hit, *I've Loved You So Long*, and achieved an almost identical result (£115,000 debut weekend, as against £117,000 for the earlier film). Both pictures went on to expand to 43 screens at their widest point. Although *Sarah's Key* is highly unlikely to match *I've Loved You's* UK lifetime gross of £1.3m, it's clearly going to far exceed StudioCanal's own initial target of £400,000.

A crucial element of the success was the 5 August release date, with no strong competing arthouse film in sight, and nothing very threatening arriving until Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* at the end of month. Optimum previously enjoyed success with *Coco*

## Kristin Scott Thomas at the UK box office

English Language (selected titles)			
Film	Year	Gross	
The English Patient	1997	£12,809,287	
Gosford Park	2002	£12,259,248	
The Horse Whisperer	1998	£5,600,870	
The Other Boleyn Girl	2008	£4,889,334	
Easy Virtue	2008	£1,353,414	
Nowhere Boy	2009	£1,305,902	
French Language			
Film	Year	Gross	
I've Loved You So Long	2008	£1,223,827	
Tell No One	2007	£1,190,386	
Sarah's Key	2011	£391,485*	
Leaving	2010	£356,135	
Petites Coupures	2003	£73,897	

\* Gross after 17 days

*Before Chanel* (31 July 2009) and *Gainsbourg* (30 July 2010). "Maybe people are going away less these days," says Trafford-Owen. "The arthouse audience is always underserved in summer months."

# Morning glory

Alan J. Pakula is best known for 1970s paranoia, but *'See You in the Morning'* is a more personal later work, says **Peter Tonguette**

Perhaps because I first saw Alan J. Pakula's *See You in the Morning* (1988) the year after my father died, I persist in thinking of it as a story of loss rather than one of divorce. Most critics tell me I'm mistaken. *Time Out* called it a "risible divorce drama". *The New York Times's* Vincent Canby felt the film was "about that upscale phenomenon the movie identifies as 'musical families'."

Actually there is reason to suppose Pakula thought of the film as I do, though he carefully conceals his intentions at first. Brief introductory sketches present two families who seem happy, until problems emerge. We meet psychiatrist Larry Livingstone (Jeff Bridges, never more appealing), who is spending a weekend at his mother-in-law's with his wife Jo (Farrah Fawcett) and their two young children. At the end of the day, Jo soberly tells Larry that they "have to have a talk." "What about?" he naively asks, holding her hand. "Us," she answers. Uh-oh.

After a fade-out, the story shifts to the Goodwins, concert pianist Peter (David Dukes) and his wife Beth (Alice Krige). They also have two children, and the quartet is moving into an imposing Manhattan brownstone. Late that night, Peter sits at the piano and asks Beth, with a hint of despair, "What would you do if I could never give another concert?"

A title card appears: "Three Years Later". The next thing we know, Larry and Beth are in bed together. A scene later, he is wishing her a happy wedding day. We assume that Beth, like Larry, has got a divorce – that her husband's angst led to the disintegration of her marriage. But that is not the case. We next see Beth pausing to look at a group of framed photographs of Peter. The way she looks at them, and then turns away and stares off camera, is not the way a divorcee would look. What is she remembering? Not the details of a joint-custody agreement.

Through a series of intricate flashbacks, it's revealed that Peter's left hand became paralysed. Unable to face the prospect of career ruin, he took his own life. And so the film's subject reveals itself. In the same series of flashbacks, Beth is seen talking to a friend in the hours after Peter's death, when their children – Cathy (Drew Barrymore)



Smile please: Jeff Bridges and extended family, including a young Macaulay Culkin, left

and Petey (Lukas Haas) – bound in the door, unaware that they are suddenly fatherless. Just as Pakula only indicates Peter's death, declining to show it, Beth hesitates in telling Petey and Cathy the news. She stands in the foyer, oblivious to the hustle and commotion of two children just home from school, as paralysed as Peter's left hand. Cathy finally asks, "Mommy, what's wrong?"

For Beth, Cathy and Petey, what's wrong is much more than a mere divorce, though it was Pakula's divorce from actress Hope Lange (and remarriage to biographer Hannah Boorstin) that inspired the movie. According to his biographer Jared Brown, *See You in the Morning* came about because Pakula was "determined to make a picture based on his own life" (and this is one of only a handful of films he scripted himself). He could have stopped there and made what Stanley Cavell would call a "comedy of remarriage". Yet he went further, borrowing details from the life of Boorstin, who was a young

## 'See You in the Morning' is among Alan J. Pakula's nimblest films

widow when she met the director. It's the most personal film of Pakula's career, but its richness derives from the ways he made it not only about himself, but also about Hannah.

Though he's most famous for his 'paranoia trilogy', as it's termed – *Khute* (1971), *The Parallax View* (1974) and *All the President's Men* (1976) – a Renoir-like humanist side to Pakula shines through in early films like *Love and Pain* and *the Whole Damn Thing* (1972), and is fully expressed in *Sophie's Choice* (1982) and the neglected *See You in the Morning*, which Brown says had a "disastrous showing" at the box office.

Pakula outlines Larry and Beth's relationship wittily. When they first

meet at a party, the biggest thing they have in common is that they are both *migraineurs*; they walk home pale-faced and perspiring, shuffling in the dark city streets. Yet even after their marriage, the memory of Peter lingers, particularly for Peter's children, who become latch-key kids. Cathy shoplifts from Bloomingdale's. Petey makes a heartrending solitary trip to his father's grave.

Larry does his best, but he is in an impossible position. As he says, "This is their father's house... And I'm not their father." Larry's presence is only palatable to the extent that he can co-exist with the kids' memory of their father, which is embodied in the brownstone they moved into before he died. When Petey learns that Larry wants to sell it, he goes from embracing his stepfather (who is nothing if not obsequious) to coldly shunning him.

As a producer, before he took up directing himself, Pakula's most celebrated film was Robert Mulligan's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962). Like Beth at the beginning of *See You in the Morning*, *Mockingbird's* Atticus Finch (a widower) bears the burden of single parenthood. Remember what he tells his son Jem as he explains that he is too old to play football with him: "After all, I'm the only father you have." When Beth brings Larry home for the first time, he overhears Petey and Cathy greeting her, and comments, "Those kids sure seem relieved to get you back home." She replies, "When you lose one parent, you keep waiting for the other one to fall." What painful truth is in that line, which echoes Atticus's.

Has my sense of how accurately the film depicts the aftermath of losing a father prejudiced me in its favour? Perhaps, yet who can deny that it is among Pakula's nimblest films, beautifully edited by his longtime colleague Evan Lottman. Cinematographer Donald McAlpine, meanwhile, proves a worthy successor to Gordon Willis, who shot Pakula's great 1970s films.

Larry, Beth and the children do finally move house, but Pakula reminds us that the decision has a cost. Standing in the empty brownstone, Petey carves a tribute to his father ("In this house there once lived a great musician and a great man") inside a cabinet door. We hear Larry calling for him to hurry up – the last thing he wants to do.

Early in their relationship, Beth tells Larry that he's a funny man. Larry corrects her: "Funny weird." *See You in the Morning* is funny sad. What could be sadder than a bereaved child clinging to his late father's house?

## What the papers said



"The screenplay is so scrupulous, so fair, so enlightened and so intelligent that real people have trouble shouldering it aside so that they can share messy human emotions. Nothing is ever quite this neat." **Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun-Times, 21 April 1989**

"This is so evidently 'written' a film... that it becomes a collection of opinions about relationships, rather than about the characters who are supposedly having them. One consequence of this over-elaborated writing is that whether the dramatic tone is benign, denunciatory or enraged, there's a tone of blandly unvarying goodwill to the film." **Richard Combs, MFB, May 1990**

"OUTSTANDING... THE MOST STYLISH FILM IN YEARS"

*The Independent*



*The Guardian*



*Daily Mirror*



*The Times*



*The Independent*

*Ryan Gosling*

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# Raúl Ruiz: 1941 – 2011

*Exiled from his native Chile, he forged a new career as a prolific arthouse director in Europe. By Jonathan Romney*

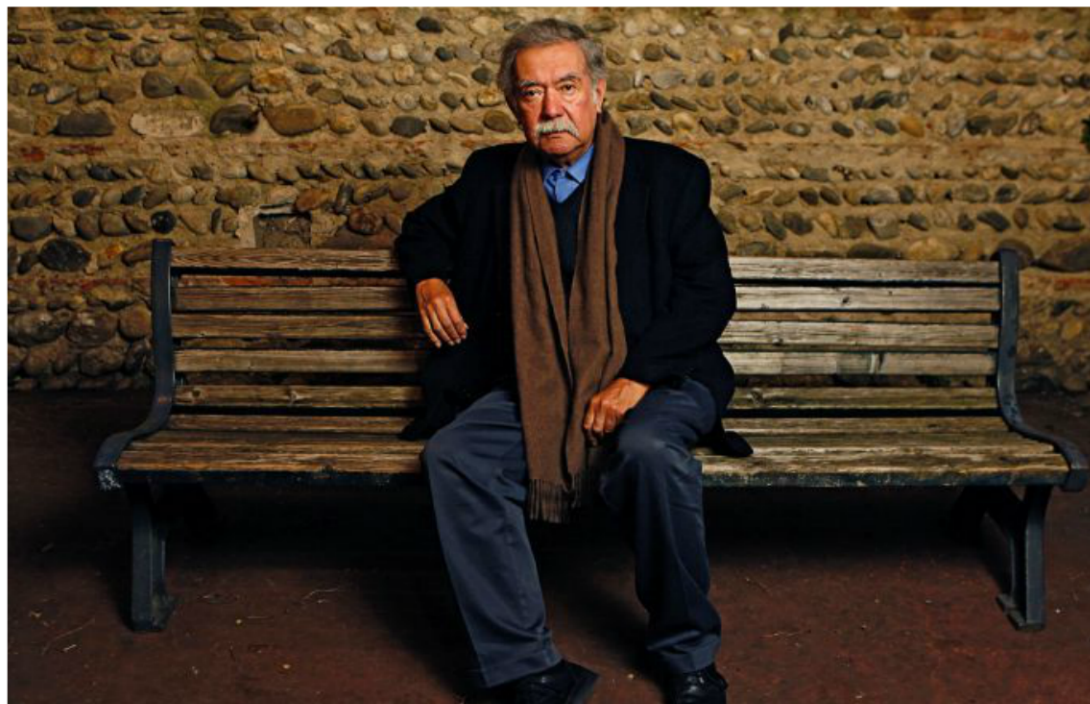
With the death of Raúl Ruiz on Friday 19 August, cinema has lost a dimension – an entirely alternative one, foreign to the familiar laws of film language and practice. We may find ourselves wondering now whether Ruiz ever really existed, or whether his wildly expansive oeuvre was the stuff of dreams, an entirely apocryphal career like those of the imaginary writers hypothesised in recent years by his fellow Chilean fabulist Roberto Bolaño.

Sometimes I suspect I may have dreamed some of the Ruiz films I've watched. I'm not sure how many of his films I've seen – at the last count, something over 30 – but I certainly don't remember them all in detail. I've even come across reviews of his features in the *Time Out Film Guide*, then realised with surprise that I'd written them myself. But that's because Ruiz's films weren't always conventionally memorable – if 'memorable' means that a film leaves an impression because it is coherent and complete. Rather his creations were often fragmentary, provisional, ephemeral, like dreams that grip and perplex, then confoundingly dissolve when you wake up.

But let's not mystify his films: they felt all the more authentically dreamlike for being manifestly fabricated by a director-puppeteer creating uncanny effects through overt tricks of focus and framing, or by moving actors, props and camera around on castors. Purely as a technician of visual effects, Ruiz expanded the language of cinema; but he also expanded film's expressive and intellectual palette by freeing it from the commonplaces of character and plot, or of spatial and temporal uniformity.

Ruiz was famously an exile, leaving his native Chile for France in the mid-1970s. But he was also an exile from the worlds of literature and philosophy, an errant man of letters (above all, pre-20th-century letters) carrying his personal imaginative library in his wanderings through the territory of cinema, a domain often indifferent or hostile to literary values – or at least to the sort of arcane literary values that Ruiz celebrated.

Born in Puerto Montt, Chile, in 1941, Ruiz studied law and theology, but his passion was experimental drama, and he claimed to have



Polymath: as well as writing and directing films, Raúl Ruiz was also in his time installation artist, comic-strip scenarist and academic

written 100 plays as a young man. His first feature *Three Sad Tigers* (*Tres tristes tigres*, 1968) was as close as he came to naturalism, an ensemble piece that showed the influence of the *nouvelle vague* and Cassavetes. *The Penal Colony* (*La colonia penal*, 1971) was an early example of Ruiz's idiosyncratic appropriation of texts – Kafka recast as a blackly satirical take on Latin American politics. The film proved only too prescient of later events in Chile, and Ruiz and his wife Valeria Sarmiento – a director in her own right, and a regular editor of his films – would leave for France just before the Pinochet coup of 1973.

Shot in early 1974, *Dialogues of the Exiled* (*Diálogos de exiliados*) directly explored the new condition of Chilean exile. It set the pattern for Ruiz's phenomenal output over the next decade and a half. His breakthrough film of this period was the eerie *The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting* (*L'Hypothèse du tableau volé*, 1979), shot by Sacha Vierny and based on the writings of Pierre Klossowski. Loosely describable as Ruiz's own *Last Year in Marienbad*, it was a sort of metaphysical detective story in the form of a series of paintings recreated as *tableaux vivants*. *Three Crowns of the*

*Sailor* (*Les Trois Couronnes du matelot*, 1983) was an uncanny sea story, Ruiz's 'Ancient Mariner' and 'Flying Dutchman' combined, with thematic and visual echoes of Orson Welles's Isak Dinesen adaptation *The Immortal Story*.

In a phenomenally industrious period that also saw Ruiz working as co-director of the Maison de la Culture in Le Havre, he also made the multilingual *Point de fuite* (1984), adaptations of Racine, Shakespeare, Arthur Adamov and the Iranian writer Sadegh Hedayat (*The Blind Owl/La Chouette aveugle*, perhaps Ruiz's most purely oneiric narrative), as well as an extraordinary fantasia on *Treasure Island* (1985), less an adaptation than a self-reflexive 're-dreaming' of Stevenson's novel, with Jean-Pierre Léaud and Martin Landau. *Life is a Dream* (*Mémoire des apparences*, 1986), which emerged from Ruiz's stage production of Calderón's play in Avignon, merged the Spanish Golden Age metaphysical drama with a cinephile political thriller that drew on Ruiz's childhood passion for *Flash Gordon* serials.

An errant director who filmed variously in France, Holland, the US and, repeatedly, Portugal, Ruiz settled

down in a sense in the 1990s, reaching an entente with the European mainstream. *Three Lives and Only One Death* (*Trois vies et une seule mort*, 1996), exploding the notion of unified character and linear biographic narrative, starred Marcello Mastroianni – a confident shot at an approachable yet still wildly eccentric mainstream art film. His apotheosis as a bankable arthouse director came with *Time Regained* (*Le Temps retrouvé*, 1999), a subtle engagement with Proust's themes of memory and metamorphosis.

Ruiz continued to work with bigger budgets and financeable names (Deneuve, Malkovich, Huppert et al), but no one was fooled about his attitude to mainstream narrative values – which wasn't dismissive by any means, just proudly oblique. *Shattered Image*, a 1998 US production starring Anne Parillaud, is an entertainingly fragmented deconstruction of the erotic thriller.

Unlike many experimental filmmakers, Ruiz was passionately committed to both the idea and the activity of storytelling – which meant taking narrative to its farthest limits, to the point at which it both replicates and devours itself. Perhaps the closest cinema has come to the possibilities imagined by Borges's short story 'The Garden of Forking Paths', the underrated *Combat d'amour en songe* (2000) is a vertiginous contemplation of narrative as an art

**His creations were often fragmentary, ephemeral, like dreams that grip and perplex, then confoundingly dissolve**

# Creature feature

of combination; the film is at once Ruiz's own *Saragossa Manuscript* and a set of portable preludes to his later *Mysteries of Lisbon* (*Mistérios de Lisboa*).

Ruiz began to visit Chile again in the 1990s, and recently completed another film there. Last year he underwent an operation for liver cancer – an operation he had delayed in order to film a cherished project with his long-time producer Paolo Branco: *Mysteries of Lisbon*, a four-hour film and six-hour TV series based on the 19th-century novel by Camilo Castelo Branco. The result is at once one of Ruiz's straighter works and one of his most distinctive – a flowing, twisting, leisurely river of narratives within narratives, with characters changing identities and passing in and out of each other's lives in a picaresque flux that is as much Proustian as Balzacian. Executed with sober sumptuousness à la Visconti, the film was released to acclaim in the US in August this year, and saw Ruiz receiving more admiring publicity than he had since *Time Regained*. Although not strictly his last film, *Mysteries* nevertheless stands as a perfect closing testament – a stately meditation on fate, memory and the possibility that our lives may be bewitching labyrinths of fact and fabulation.

To paraphrase one of his titles, Ruiz's obituary comprises one death and any number of lives. Tirelessly energetic, he was also in his time an installation artist, a comic-strip scenarist, a fiction writer (including a personal reworking of *Treasure Island*), an academic (he recently taught a course in film and neurology in Aberdeen) and screenplay collaborator on the films of his wife Valeria Sarmiento. He was also an influential theorist of cinema, writing two volumes of a provocative and complex *Poetics of Cinema*.

Softly spoken and modest, Ruiz was a serious and erudite man, driven by intense intellectual curiosity, but also about as ludic a filmmaker as there has ever been. In person he resembled one of the perpetually distracted bewhiskered savants on the polar voyage in Hergé's Tintin book *The Shooting Star*. And he too was a polar explorer, in a sense, going to cinema's farthest reaches and discovering an unsuspected range of the artform's possibilities – and its impossibilities. He leaves behind not so much a body of work as a vast imaginary continent, still largely unmapped and awaiting exploration.

■ *'Mysteries of Lisbon'* is released in the UK in early December

*As a season of films by NY maverick Jack Smith arrives in the UK, Amy Taubin celebrates his legacy*

The years 1963-64 were a golden age for the beat-romantic strain of American underground movies. In a period of roughly 12 months, Jack Smith's 'Flaming Creatures', Ken Jacobs and Bob Fleischer's 'Blonde Cobra' (starring Jack Smith), Andy Warhol's 'Kiss, Sleep' and 'Haircut', and Barbara Rubin's 'Christmas on Earth' exploded on to the screens of mouldy cinemas (mouldy and pasty were favourite Smith adjectives) in a tumult of high-contrast 16mm black and white. None of them achieved the notoriety of 'Flaming Creatures', which became the subject of an obscenity case that went all the way to the Supreme Court. After the high court refused to hear the case, the film was left in legal limbo, a sabotage that Smith – an ace at self-destruction – could not have bettered.

Although championed for decades by such critics as Jonas Mekas, J. Hoberman (see his 'On Jack Smith's "Flaming Creatures" and Other Secret-Flix of Cinemaroc', published in 2001 and long overdue for reprinting) and Susan Sontag (whose landmark essay 'Notes on "Camp"' was largely written in the film's defence), 'Flaming Creatures' was effectively closeted. Smith was unable to benefit financially or artistically from what was then and remains today a subversive masterpiece. He died, impoverished, of Aids in 1989.

After his death, another lengthy court battle was finally settled when the Barbara Gladstone Gallery bought

the rights to all of Smith's work, largely because of the value of the thousands of colour photographs that he'd shot but seldom bothered to print between 1958 and 1962. They depict various 'creatures' whose hairy limbs, saggy bottoms and flaccid dicks peep indecorously from tattered chiffons and velvets Smith had fished from trash bins. Instancing Smith's distinctive aesthetic – pre-Raphaelite crossed with Arte Povera – these photographs are astonishingly prophetic of gender-bending, high/low trends in fashion photography over the past 50 years, and directly influenced the work of such artist/photographers as Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin.

As a result of the Gladstone Gallery's acquisition, Smith's film work is newly available to and promoted by museums and galleries. This is a mixed blessing. 'Flaming Creatures' and the three-minute, perfect remnant of damaged goods 'Scotch Tape' (1959-62) were the only films that Smith ever completed. Smith continued to recut the others, including the feature-length 'Normal Love' (1963-4) and the one-hour 'No President' (1967-70), for the remainder of his life, using them as props for the live performances in which his genius flourished.

My most memorable experience of the lushly coloured tableaux vivants, mad gambols across field and forest, and faux couplings that comprise 'Normal Love' occurred when the take-up mechanism of a projector inadvertently (or not) malfunctioned and an entire 45-minute reel unspooled all over the floor of the makeshift booth, from which issued Smith's keening, nasal, falsetto lament for the unchecked destruction

of his might-have-been masterpiece. Of Smith's performing persona and strategy, Richard Foreman, director of the experimental Ontological-Hysteric Theater, wrote: "To watch Jack Smith perform was to watch human behavior turned into granular stasis, in which every moment of being seemed, somehow, to contain the seed of unthinkable possibility."

Smith doesn't appear in 'Flaming Creatures', although his voice is heard in the spoofed commercial for "indelible heart-shaped lipstick" – the kind that "won't rub-off on a man's cock". The film depicts, in series of drag-show routines that fall apart long before their possible punchlines, a bacchanal that takes place in a crumbling loft space and whose participants are a democratic mix of male transvestites, women and a couple of guys in merchant-marine uniforms who seem to have wandered in by mistake.

As stunningly transgressive today as when it was first shown, 'Flaming Creatures' glories in what is most forbidden in 'serious' art: complete regression to an infantile realm – a limbo where penises are limp, pleasure is polymorphous perverse, and climaxes, dramatic or sexual, never enter the picture. The feigned gang rape of a woman focuses on her breast, which is diddled, poked and nearly devoured by envious overgrown babies. What gives the film its rhythmically shaped and variety is the brilliantly collaged score by Tony Conrad, which employs 'exotic' pop tunes from the kind of B movies that were Smith's main inspiration, as well as some Bartók for good nihilistic measure.

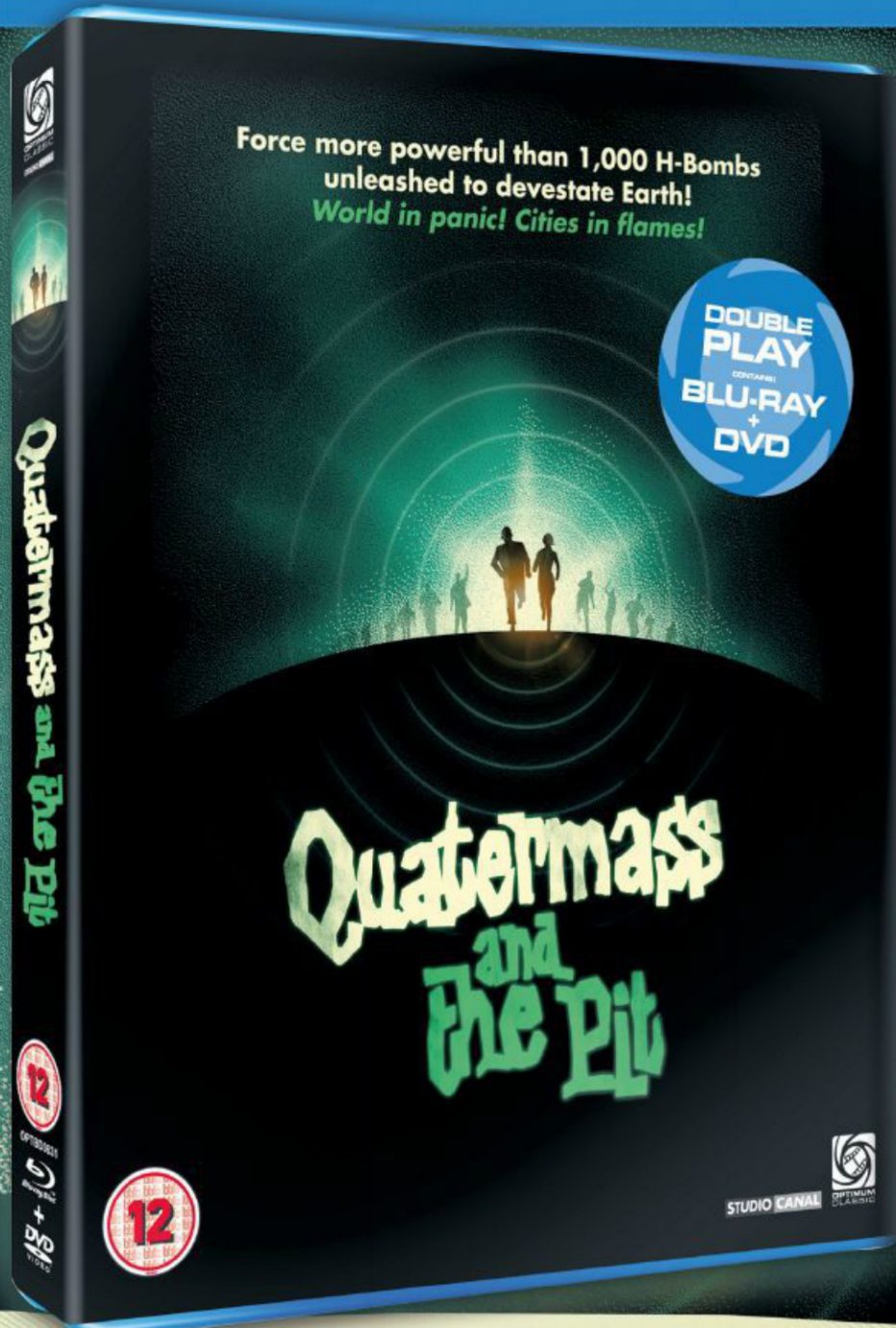
'Flaming Creatures' is fashioned entirely of the detritus of respectable society – from the performers to their safety-pinned costumes to the film stock itself. Smith used outdated rolls of 16mm reversal, rescued from 50-cent bins, and the resulting resplendent accidents of light, myriad gradations of grey and chaotic dancing grain have proved indestructible. The Baudelairian beauty of 'Flaming Creatures' is as ravishing in a fourth-generation bootleg print as in the brand-new ones currently doing the rounds. But see it ASAP – before the inevitable happens and 'Flaming Creatures' is consigned to a denatured digital eternity.

■ 'Jack Smith: A Feast for Open Eyes', a season of films, talks and events, runs from 7-18 September at the ICA, London



Flower people: Smith's photographs juxtapose bright fabrics and hairy arms

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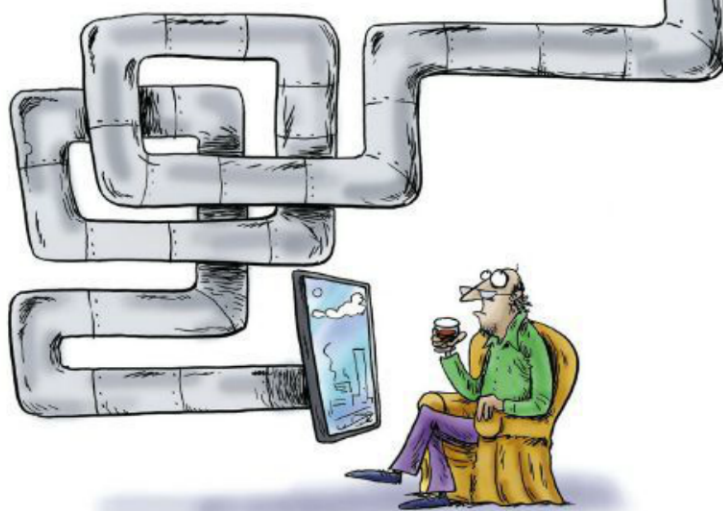
# At the flick of a switch

Deep in the recesses of our garage – a space given over more to HIY (Hoard It Yourself) than to DIY – is a battered and much-treasured cassette, the felt-tip writing on its label slightly smudged by the Great Flood of 1997. Along with some other stuff I am having difficulty identifying, it contains Chris Marker's great poetic documentary *Sans soleil* (Sunless, 1982), recorded off SBS Television in Australia in the winter of 1985. Two things recently reminded me of that tape's existence. The first was something Mark Cousins said after a preview screening of his wonderful new series *The Story of Film* (see p.36). He was talking about how he first became fanatical about film (a phrase that fits Cousins far better than it does the Odeon circuit, who emblazon it on their awnings but are more properly passionate about popcorn). He revealed that he first heard of *Citizen Kane* when he was 12, but had to wait until he was 18 to see it – not because of censorship, but because back then, unless a cinema put it on, there was not much you could do except wait.

The other thing that made me think of that tape was the arrival – thank you very much, Optimum – of a box-set of Marker's films, one disc containing not just *Sans soleil* sans smudges but Marker's masterpiece *La Jetée* (1962) as well. No need to go into the garage. No need to seek out, track down or even store anything: it's all available now, if not on DVD, then on VOD. And if not on VOD, then on YouTube. And if not on YouTube, then via bit torrent.

Well, not quite all, of course. Huge areas of film history are featureless blanks, like Mongolia on Google Earth. And forget seeing *Star Wars* the way you may remember it from 1977: that nice George Lucas has improved it all for you, replacing your childhood memories with a digitally enhanced version that contains scenes you have never seen before and omits some you have.

But by and large we live in a world where films are as available as books ever were. I wrote a couple of years back about my delight when someone sent me review copies of Wojciech Has's *The Saragossa Manuscript* (1965) – which I had first seen in some dank suburban cinema in Paris longer ago than you want me to mention – together with *The Hourglass Sanatorium* (1973), which I had never managed to see. Oh braver new world than the old one, where your cinematic education was ruled by geographical serendipity.



**I wonder how cinema will be affected by the way in which we watch it – not in a communal, cinematic setting but in home-based and handheld solitude**

Doing programme notes for the BFI's recent Alain Resnais season, I realised I could see almost every one of his films on DVD. And seeing *La Jetée* again last night – as extraordinary as ever, not just reinventing cinema but making a profound point about the nature of human memory as well – I realised just how much Marker's film had influenced Resnais's unjustly overlooked *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968). I knew that Resnais had asked Marker to write a screenplay for him (they had collaborated on the 1956 documentary *Toute la mémoire du monde*), but that Marker had suggested instead a novel by Belgian writer Jacques Sternberg. It features a strange memory-travel machine that is the benign equivalent to the experiments undergone by the prisoner in *La Jetée*.

In a way I'm pleased that there's this kind of serendipity in the modern world of plenty, too, causing me to rediscover *La Jetée* long after the Resnais notes went to press. Pleased, too, that in relation to films in which past and future are reversed, the information should likewise have come to me in the wrong order. But we pay a price for all this. Those Parisian cinemas and that smudgy tape in the garage are also part of my cinematic culture. Increasingly I wonder how cinema will be affected by the radically shifting way in which we watch it – not in a communal, cinematic setting but in home-based and handheld solitude. As a teacher, I have always insisted that there is

no such thing as the perfect black box, and that the environment in which a film is seen influences our perception of it. A film, like a book, needs to take you into its world, and its world until very recently has always been a cinema.

Don't humour me here: I am not making a nostalgic plea for the magic of the silver screen, the glamour (and toilet odours) of the picture palaces, the distinctive smell of the Paris metro and the school-gym-like discomfort of the *cinémas de quartier* with their bad-tempered *ouvreuses*. I do recognise that – part of my cinematic heritage though all of this undoubtedly is – it belongs as much to its time as did the spieler and the pianist in a silent cinema.

But it is made slightly more sinister by the fact that this ease of access relies on a process every bit as determining as Hollywood's famous hegemony. In a world where digital newcomer Netflix (2010 turnover \$2.2 billion) can have a market capitalisation of \$13.7 billion – six times turnover – while Time Warner (2010 turnover \$26.9 billion) has a capitalisation of \$31.8 billion (little more than turnover), it's not hard to see which way the wind is blowing: the pipeline is worth more than the product. The question is, how long can a supplier like Netflix survive without a producer like Time Warner (and the rest of Hollywood) to feed it? And how long will there be the range of product that makes the new pipeline so seductive?

◆◆ Nick Roddick

## EVENTS

● **London Spanish Film Festival** screens 30 recent highlights from Spain, opening with Andrucha Waddington's 'Lope' and including Paco Cabezas's 'Neon Flesh', Mateo Gil's 'Blackthorn' and Oscar Aibar's 'El gran Vázquez'. Ciné Lumière and other London venues, 23 September to 6 October.

● **Cambridge Film Festival** again screens selections of the most interesting recent cinema from around the world, plus sidebars including one on Lucien Pintilie, the godfather of new Romanian cinema. Cambridge Arts Picturehouse, 15-25 September. See [www.cambridgefilmfestival.org.uk](http://www.cambridgefilmfestival.org.uk)

● **Abandon Normal Devices** returns with another programme of cutting-edge, cross-platform film and art. The theme of this year's festival is "the outer limits of belief", delving into UFOs, cults, fake gurus and more. Screenings include Shezad Dawood's 'Piercing Brightness' and 'Primate Cinema: Apes as Family', a film "made for chimpanzees to watch" by LA-based artist Rachel Mayeri. Various venues in Manchester, Liverpool and Lancashire, 29 September to 2 October. See [www.andfestival.org.uk](http://www.andfestival.org.uk)



● **Branchage Film Festival**, Jersey's wonderfully quirky annual event, returns with another programme of screenings in unusual locations around the island's capital, closing with the restored version of Herbert Ponting's 'The Great White Silence' (above) in the Jersey Opera House, with live score by Simon Fisher Turner and the Elysian Quartet. St Helier and around Jersey, 22-25 September.

● **Disenchanted: The Crimes of Love** is a free one-day exhibition celebrating the impact of Jean Genet's only film 'Un chant d'amour', first released 60 years ago in 1951. The day features a screening of the film, talks by Genet experts Jane Giles and Jeremy Reed, followed by screenings of Fassbinder's 'Querelle' and Patrice Chéreau's 'L'homme blessé'. The Future Gallery, London WC2, 10 September. Tickets available from <http://disenchantedcrimesoflove.eventbrite.com>

Despite inevitable compression, 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy' the movie perfectly captures the mood of John le Carré's novel, says **John Sutherland**. Overleaf, Gary Oldman talks to **James Bell** about playing George Smiley

# TO CATCH A SPY

**T**wo big questions hover over the film *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. How good a slow-burn spy thriller is it, and how well does it adapt one of the trickier narratives in contemporary fiction? Retired agent George Smiley (Gary Oldman) is brought back to uncover painstakingly the identity of a "mole" – a double agent, working for the Soviets – who is one of the four men who currently lead "the Circus", author John le Carré's nickname for MI6. 'Film of the Book', one recalls, is usually another way of saying 'nowhere near as good'.

There is another question of urgent interest to the film's makers, whose cash and reputations are invested in the project: will it be a hit? On precedent, no it probably won't be; or at least not a smash hit in the *Casino Royale* or even (perish the thought) the *Austin Powers* class. As the excellent but anaemically profitable *The Good Shepherd* (2006) made clear, slow, honest films about this particular skeleton in the West's cupboard are not much to the public taste at the moment, even when they star Matt Damon. We brought the 'Evil Empire' down, but don't want to know precisely what evil of our own was required to do so. Leave it for future historians to sniff that dirty washing.

*TTSS* is set in the early years of the 1970s. The novel, for example, alludes wryly to George Smiley's awkwardness with Britain's newly (February 1971) decimalised coinage. It was, historically, another low dishonest decade, as Auden called the 1930s, and for most cinemagoers in 2011 it will be ancient history: interesting, but not quite as interesting as the 1950s or 60s – currently being boomed on television by *Mad Men* and *The Hour*. *TTSS*'s director Tomas Alfredson, one calculates, was a six-year-old in Stockholm in 1971 – not particularly concerned, one presumes, about the Cold War, from which Sweden had wisely kept itself neutral.

Dense historical framework is vital to le Carré's design and the moral climate of his trilogy – of which *TTSS* is the first part – charting Smiley's battle of wits with the Soviet intelligence officer codenamed Karla. With 127 minutes of screen time at its disposal, the film can only lightly sketch

in that framework (which it does brilliantly), whereas the 1979 BBC television adaptation had 290 minutes to air le Carré's nuances. The early 1970s were the lowest-ever point in MI6's existence. Just how low is vividly depicted in a book that has come out in the same season as the film, Gordon Corera's *The Art of Betrayal: Life and Death in the British Secret Service*. It was a precipitate fall. Some would maintain that the code-breakers at Bletchley and SIS won the war for Britain. In the 1940s and 1950s the British intelligence services, which had got into Kipling's "Great Game" long before the American OSS and CIA, were the spying trade's 'big brothers'. Rarely, in the 20th century, had we punched so effectively above our weight.

Smiley, the novel is at pains to stress, belongs to that heroic generation of war-winning gentleman-spies. He is "loyal to his own time" – but his time is passing. Alfredson conveys this sense of *fin de ligne* by means of a pervasively crepuscular tone – this is a film without luminosity. Darkness is falling for Smiley's generation. His unmasking of Karla's mole – the cancer destroying the agency – will be a partial vindication of the cause he has served: his 'legacy', a monument. It could even, who knows, be a cure for what has gone so badly wrong.

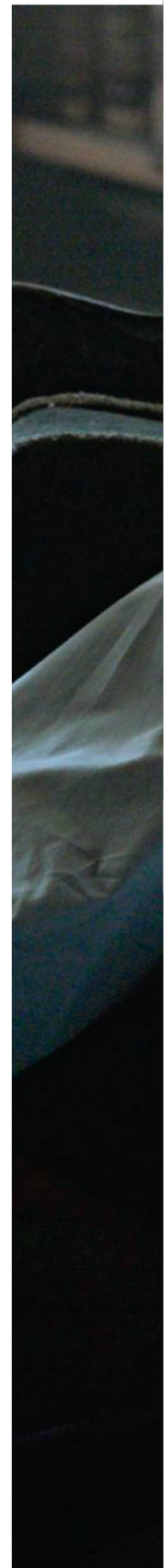
By the time le Carré was writing *TTSS* in the early 1970s, MI6 had been shaken to near destruction by the belated discovery of traitors at its core – notably the 'Cambridge spies'. Three – pre-eminently Kim Philby – had been belatedly exposed and were now strutting the Moscow streets as Soviet heroes. But there was, it was known, a fourth and – paranoia suspected – a fifth.

Harold Wilson's Labour government (in power until 1970, and again in 1974) loathed both British intelligence services even more than they feared Khrushchev's KGB. On their side, there were those in the service who were firmly of the belief that Wilson was himself a Moscow stooge. Did MI5 bug and burgle Number 10? Wilson thought they did. Corera seems in two minds about it.

## Spooks like us

In the film of *TTSS* there is a piquant jolt for connoisseurs of the genre. George Smiley is shown returning home. The house he enters is in Lloyd

**THE HUMAN FACTOR**  
Having made his name with volatile, extrovert performances, Gary Oldman reveals a quieter side as George Smiley in 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy'





## Le Carré's world is as exclusive – in class, gender and educational background – as a St James's club

◀ Square – a handsome Georgian enclave just up from unhandsome King's Cross. It is the same house that Tom Quinn (Matthew Macfadyen) has in the British television series *Spooks*. The similarities between the worlds of George Smiley and Harry Pearce (Peter Firth), *Spooks*' Head of Counter-Terrorism, end with that coincidence. (A sly joke? One would like to think so.) The *Spooks* team (a word that would have made Smiley shudder) is MI5 – omnipotently fending off alien assaults on the homeland. Britain, in the 21st century, is no longer a player in the Great Game – leave that to the CIA. But by God, says *Spooks*, we're star players in our own little league.

The *Spooks* operation is techno-dependent. With a couple of brushes across the keyboard, computer whiz Tariq can find any needle in any haystack. Nothing can hide from their all-seeing eye. Smiley's Circus has its "wranglers" (cryptanalysts labouring away upstairs), but is primarily concerned with "warm bodies". Their principal business is "humint" – human intelligence – and with it Graham Greene's "human factor". A computer programme may let you down – but it will never betray you. There is no such thing as a Judas chip. The *Spooks* outfit has central roles for women, ethnics and products of the comprehensive school. Le Carré's world is as exclusive – in class, gender and educational background – as a St James's club. (The Travellers is Smiley's, while the more flamboyant Bill Haydon – played here by Colin Firth – favours the Savile.) They were, after all, 'Cambridge spies', not products of some god-forsaken redbrick. Smiley, a significant detail, did medieval history at the other place, Oxford.

Le Carré's narratives are, notoriously, infected by the disinformative techniques he was trained in before he took to writing novels about them (to the great displeasure of his superiors, Corera tells us). Superficially *TTSS* shapes up as a detective novel – a whodunnit or, more specifically, 'whoisit?'. Smiley, along with his "control" (played in the film by a wonderfully eruptive John Hurt), has been put

out to pasture. Their removal has been engineered by the wily Karla to get his man to the top of the Circus's slippery pole. Now Smiley is recalled on a last clandestine mission – spying on his fellow spies – to root out Karla's man and save the world. And, more importantly, to save MI6's reputation.

### Wilderness of mirrors

In an Agatha Christie or an Ian Rankin novel, mystery gradually clarifies into solution. In a Le Carré novel, mystery merely multiplies. Hunting the mole leads into a "wilderness of mirrors". That powerful image was coined, in his utter frustration, by James Jesus Angleton, the head of the CIA's counter-intelligence operation in the 1970s (the Angleton character, Edward Wilson, is played by Matt Damon in *The Good Shepherd*). Angleton went clinically mad in the hunt for the mole, 'Sasha', who he was convinced was burrowing away at Langley. As Corera records, Angleton had a private vault packed with 40,000 files on suspects. There was a vault within the vault containing the cream of the evidence, to be fingered only by Angleton himself. All trails went cold or nowhere. Angleton went alcoholic and crazy.

If war is fog, espionage brews the mother of fogs. Nebulosity works in Le Carré's novels, but it poses problems for film. Alfredson – on the evidence of *Let the Right One In*, whose unexpected success surely brought him this plum assignment – is extraordinarily strong on mood. Scripted by Bridget O'Connor and Peter Straughan, this adaptation sharpens up Le Carré drastically, creating (as the novelist never does) a clear-cut beginning, middle and end, but contriving to retain the murky essence of the source text. There is homage, even in the necessary infidelities of the adaptation.

The end of the film may be, for some tastes, rather too clear-cut (Alfredson does not have the luxury of two sequels). The beginning – a shootout in Budapest as the attempt to 'turn' a Hungarian general goes wrong – involves some radical rearrangement of Le Carré's text. Purists may object

## IT'S ALL IN THE SPECTACLES

Gary Oldman talks to James Bell about how he made the role of George Smiley his own in 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy'

**James Bell:** George Smiley in 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy' is your first lead role for a while.

**Gary Oldman:** Yes, and I was a little nervous, to be honest. I don't know whether that was because I was stepping into the shoes of Alec Guinness, or just it being a lead role again. It was very good to get back to having some consistency to the work, coming in every day and feeling a real part of it. With these bigger films, you can sometimes feel a little disconnected. *The Dark Knight Rises*, for instance, shoots from April to November, and you come in for a day, have two weeks off, come in for another couple of days, have another week off... It was good to come in for three months and work straight through.

**JB:** Were you a fan of Le Carré before you were cast?

**GO:** Not especially, though I had read *Tinker Tailor*, and remembered the [1979] series, because I'm of the generation that watched it at the time when it was on TV.

**JB:** Did you know Alec Guinness, who played Smiley?

**GO:** No, he was one of the older generation of actors that I unfortunately never got to meet, though I was always a great admirer. I feel like I know him because of the incredible anecdotes that Le Carré would tell, along with doing a rather good impersonation of him!

**JB:** Guinness made the role of Smiley his own – so much so that Le Carré said he couldn't help picturing him when he wrote Smiley in later books. When you began developing the role, was it a case of consciously finding distinctions between your portrayal and Guinness's?

**GO:** I took the approach that there's more than one Hamlet, there's more than one King Lear, and actors interpret and reinterpret roles. I viewed it like you might approach a classical part: that there are certain things that you are going to arrive at – and that Guinness, in a way, had done some of the groundwork for me, because we are playing the same character and in some cases saying the same dialogue in the same scene. I thought I'd embrace it, rather than go deliberately looking for differences. The fact that we're different animals, so to speak, meant that it would be my interpretation. Along with that I spoke to David Cornwell – or Le Carré, or whatever we're calling him – and that influenced the interpretation very much.

I left the series completely alone while we were filming. We weren't making a remake, though it is in some ways a reinterpretation, with Le Carré's blessing. But it's its own thing, an original piece, and I didn't want to be infected. Well, OK, I peeped at it on YouTube, but then quickly left it alone.

Among the actors, we did all talk about the characters, but mostly in passing, in the trailers or over lunch. One of us would have gone back to the book and found a line or a description that could tease

**GENTLEMEN'S CLUB**  
Left to right: Bill Haydon (Colin Firth), Toby Esterhase (David Dencik), Percy Alleline (Toby Jones), Control (John Hurt)



out something more. There was a rehearsal period, but all we really did was meet and chat about it rather than read and rehearse.

**JB: What kind of research did you do for the role?**

**GO:** I didn't work that much outside the book. I kind of studied le Carré. I didn't tell him, of course, that I was doing that, but I modelled the voice on le Carré himself – he was the springboard. I met him, watched him and listened to him.

Le Carré was an agent himself, and he's the signature, the DNA of the guy. To me he's the voice of Smiley. I heard directly from a member of his family that *Tinker Tailor* is a particularly personal book for him, more so than the others. I happened to catch him on a radio interview, talking about a more recent book, and just thought, "That voice sounds like Smiley." Surprise, surprise!

**JB: How about developing the character visually? Did you go through a lot of pairs of glasses?**

**GO:** It was an important decision, because they're synonymous with Smiley – they're his Aston Martin, his shaken-not-stirred Martini. I tried on a lot of pairs of spectacles, and you just know instantaneously if they're right or not.

I'd never worked with a director before who was so involved as Tomas [Alfredson]. You'll have a director who will have a meeting with you and the costume designer, and then go with the designer to sittings and costume fittings and so on. Tomas was there for the whole thing. I'd never had a director who'd come to prop meetings before. Normally you pick the watch, the wallet, the pen... We chose those items together.

**JB: Smiley is a relic from an earlier time, and that comes through partly in the unhurried way he interrogates – all those long pauses. The book, and the series, really allowed that to come through, but you had to work knowing you only had the length of a feature.**

**GO:** We had to turn a cow into an Oxo cube, as le Carré put it! I think Tomas has managed to do that very eloquently – the pacing doesn't feel rushed. It's the same whenever you adapt a book – there are so many wonderful things that you end up lamenting the loss of.

In a few instances there were a few things that we, the actors, fought for. Little things – the end scene in particular. It was debated whether we'd have the discussion between Smiley and the man revealed to have been the mole. The writer, Peter [Straughan], was resistant to having it. It's a big scene in the book, and in the television series. What the book does so beautifully is that you learn so much more about the mole as Smiley is reevaluating and reassessing him after the event.

Also in the same scene I say, "Is there anything particular you would like me to pass on to Ann?" [Ann being Smiley's wife.] I think in the script the



#### SEEING DOUBLE

**Playing Smiley, Oldman – above with David Dencik as Esterhase – follows in the footsteps of Alec Guinness, top, in the much-loved 1979 TV version**

line was, "What should I say to Ann?" But the line in the book is so particular, so English, I felt we had to keep it, because it's still somehow avoiding the elephant in the room. And this guy's been fucking his wife, and betrayed his country!

**JB: You portray Smiley's feelings about his betrayal by his wife Ann slightly differently from the way Guinness did it. With you the heartache's closer to the surface.**

**GO:** I wanted you to feel the sadness and the pain of the guy. They've asked him to step back in at the worst time, really, because now not only is he without Ann, he's without a job, whereas before she was always going off and having affairs, but at least he had something to do. You feel that [in the film], despite the fact that we've removed nearly every reference in the book and in the series, where people are always saying to Smiley, "And how's the lovely Ann?" In the film it's just that one moment at the party.

In talking to le Carré, what struck me was the loneliness that came through the anonymity of the job – you are professionally anonymous. We're all somewhat defined by what we do, and that affects how we think about ourselves, but these men can't acknowledge it. And you're anonymous at home too.

**JB: How did you work that corroding sense of anonymity into the character?**

**GO:** By keeping it in mind. Playing the heartache, but remembering that this man just had to get on with it. Knowing it, it contaminates the character.

**JB: You've been best known for playing very physical roles, yet Smiley is the very opposite of that.**

**GO:** I'm often asked to play kinetic, frenetic characters, but I don't consider that my entire library. But you do get typecast. You're at the mercy of the writing, and what's available, and then the imagination of the director. My hat goes off to Chris Nolan for asking me to play Gordon [in *Batman Begins* and its two sequels], and not a villain.

With [*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*], I think they threw around the names of some of the usual suspects and then my name came up, and Tomas saw something. I was thrilled to be asked to play someone very still, who was all raging underneath, and you couldn't show it.

**JB: Which makes it all the more of a shock when you do raise your voice at the end of the film.**

**GO:** I raise my voice once in the entire film. We experimented with that. I remember doing it in one take, and afterwards Tomas said, "Oh my god, you raised your voice!" Tomas asked me to try it a little bigger still, but the pitch was too much. I did it again without raising my voice, and it felt too little. It was like tuning a radio to find the right frequency. It wasn't something I'd planned after reading the script, it was just in the moment and thinking of the mole: "You betrayed my country! Who the hell are you really, for Chrissakes?" But still, it's measured, contained rage. The part is a gift.

## Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy

that le Carré does the episode off stage by report and gossip, not as in-your-face action. But the creation of tension, nervousness and – finally – debacle is masterfully done. One forgives Alfredson his liberties

In later stretches of narrative, Alfredson as skilfully thins down le Carré. Smiley's incorrigibly faithless wife Ann, a major presence in the novel, is almost wholly absent. Only a shapely rump, writhing in adulterous embrace, remains. George (ever the spy) is watching that rump. He too writhes. Spies? Voyeurs? What's the difference? Both are engaged in a dirty-minded business.

The scene in Delhi with Karla, lengthy and pivotal in the novel, is similarly reduced to a few glimpsed moments. Karla is there – but as a shadow. Many other things are done as adeptly. The film's periodisation is pitch-perfect. Dimplex, Gannex and Ajax (if you don't know what they are, you weren't there) feature nostalgically among the many tactfully placed props. The feel of the film (for those who were there) is eerily accurate.

Scandinavian is the favoured flavour for popular narrative at the moment. The Swedish director brings a tartness to the narrative which, like the drop of angostura in Smiley's pink gin, sours the whole. Put another way, there's a palpable whiff of *Wallander* in Gary Oldman's thoughtful interpretation of Smiley – the same clever use of meditative, inscrutable silence. Particularly effective – and original to the film, I think – are the scenes of Smiley swimming in Hampstead, horn-rims firmly on, hair Brylcreemed back, brain, underneath, working remorselessly.

There are some little betrayals, to use the relevant term. Purists may object to what seem like wilful alterations. Why change all the Czech locations to Hungary? Was Cambridge Circus (the seedy Soho intersection where the agency has its HQ in le Carré's world) unavailable, even as an external shot? Toby Esterhase, the Hungarian co-opted into the top echelons of the Circus, has, in the novel, a striking mane of silvery hair which inspires the nickname 'Snow White'. Percy Alleline, the intellectually mediocre acting head of the Circus, has a greasy mop of black hair, which nauseates Smiley. In the film Toby (David Dencik) is as bald as a cucumber and Percy (Toby Jones) well on the way. Couldn't wardrobe have come up with something in the cause of textual fidelity?

Not that it matters. Such details will only niggle knowing admirers of le Carré who will not, unless the film fails disastrously, be a majority in the film's audience. But this redeption relates to a larger issue. In the novel Peter Guillam, Smiley's right-hand man in his hunt for the mole, is "in long middle age" and unhappily heterosexual. He is, like his close colleagues in the top tier of the Circus, physically unprepossessing. As played here by Benedict Cumberbatch he is young, handsome – and gay. Similar treatment is given to le Carré's shop-soiled foot soldier Ricki Tarr, played by a smoulderingly good-looking Tom Hardy. In the novel Irina – the Russian woman who wins Tarr's (all too easily won) heart – is described as "a plain kid and a bit blue stocking". In the film, as played by Svetlana Khodchenkova, she is very beautiful indeed (although the camera lingers on her facial mole).

## Scandinavian is the favoured flavour for popular narrative at the moment. There's a palpable whiff of 'Wallander'

And of course there is Smiley himself. In the novel he is short, pudgy ("a generous stomach") and waddles; le Carré refers repeatedly to his ill-fitting suits. When he played Smiley in the 1979 TV serial, Alec Guinness paid particular attention to the waddle, studying Maurice Oldfield (chief of MI6), whose ludicrous gait le Carré had in mind.

Oldman is an older man here, compared to in previous screen roles, but he is lean and shot from angles that create a *bella figura*. He is no waddler. Glamorisation has always been cinema's besetting vice. Here it intrudes somewhat, but doesn't in any important way spoil the film. Oldman uses his redefinition of the Smiley prototype to create an extraordinary quiet intensity, very different from Guinness's brilliantly languid interpretation. In Oldman's Smiley there is an explosive anger buried beneath the impassive face. Occasionally one glimpses it leap, flame-like, from within. He is not, I think, an actor renowned for controlled performance. Here that effect is achieved.

### Anxiety of influence

Cinemagoers of a certain age will be conscious of what Harold Bloom called "the anxiety of influence" hanging over this production. As Bloom saw it, art is in a state of continual conflict with obligation to tradition and originality. Put at its simplest, every work of art wants to be the same but different.

In Alfredson's film, le Carré's primal influence is necessarily felt – but not dictatorially. Liberties are taken. Rather more conflicting is the makers' (and doubtless some of the audience's) concurrent awareness of earlier adaptations. How to capitalise on, yet differentiate the film from, the overwhelmingly successful 1979 TV version? How to use the widely listened to 1988 and 2009 radio versions? Use, that is, and at the same time create a necessary dividing space. Some of the film's cast (notably Oldman) hew very different interpretations from preceding adaptations; others stay close. All of which is to say that this is, in Bloomian

terms, a very anxious reworking of le Carré's novel – but no less interesting for that.

What Alfredson's film can only hint at (effectively but obliquely) is le Carré's central preoccupation – the bone forever gnawed in his fiction. Does the existence of a mole at the centre of the Circus indicate some ineradicable rot in the upper classes – the ruling class, to this day, of England? Why would a man like Philby – privileged, cultivated, the pattern of an English gentleman – betray the country that had made him such a fine specimen of the human race? Not for money, nor for the glory of being made a posthumous 'hero of the Soviet Union' and having his head on a USSR postage stamp. Was Philby a one-off 'bad seed', or evidence of something symptomatic of – and ultimately fatal to – the country that bred him?

Le Carré probes and comes to no easy conclusion. Alfredson's film does not attempt any facile explanation of the mysteries of treachery. But he does supply a denouement that's both paradoxical and satisfying – and, one should add, a radical departure from his source text. Call it an explanation in which nothing is explained.

Alfredson's *TTSS* is a hugely successful treatment of formidably resistant materials. He achieves his success by interpreting le Carré, and taking his interpretation in some illuminatingly new directions (of which, one is told, the author, who made a papal visit or two to the set, approved). The cast is immensely strong and, one senses, Alfredson has allowed what is the cream of the current British acting troupe a corresponding freedom to interpret their roles. Oldman, in particular, makes full use of that freedom. In short this is as much an enrichment as an adaptation of the book Alfredson was given to remake. One can only hope that the film will do as well as it deserves to – and that the director will be assigned the remaining parts of the trilogy.

■ *'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy'* is released on 16 September, and is reviewed on page 79

**OPENING OUT**  
In the film, Smiley's right-hand man Peter Guillam (Benedict Cumberbatch, left) is made unequivocally gay





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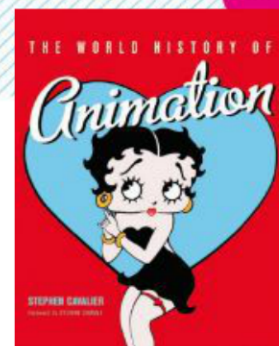
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**Q. Which one of these Studio Ghibli films won an Oscar for Best Animated Feature?**

- a. Spirited Away
- b. Howl's Moving Castle
- c. Princess Mononoke



### THE 55TH BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL: Three pairs of tickets to gala screening



The 55th BFI London Film Festival takes place from 12 to 27 October, and we are delighted to announce that *Sight & Sound* will be hosting a special screening of the Jury Prize-winner at Cannes, *The Kid with a Bike*. The Dardenne brothers' new film is the story of a boy who sets out to find his father after temporarily being put in a children's home.

**The screening takes place on Friday 21 October at a West End venue. Details tbc.**

To be in with a chance of winning a pair of tickets to the Gala screening, please answer the following question:

**Q. Which one of these Dardenne films does NOT star actor Jérémie Renier?**

- a. The Kid with a Bike
- b. The Silence of Lorna
- c. The Son

### EALING STUDIOS: Four film classics on DVD to be won

WIN



*Went the Day Well?*, *The Lavender Hill Mob*, *Whisky Galore!* and *Kind Hearts & Coronets* – just four films from the golden age of Ealing Studios.

Optimum Home Entertainment now bring these classics to DVD in digitally restored editions with bonus material featuring an introduction by Martin Scorsese (*The Lavender Hill Mob*); a BBC Radio 3 essay on British Cinema of the 1940s (*Went the Day Well?*); *Distilling!* – an original TV documentary (*Whisky Galore!*); and a host of other extra material to accompany the films. We have three sets to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

**Q. In 'Kind Hearts & Coronets', how many incarnations of the D'Ascoyne family are played by Alec Guinness?**

- a. Six
- b. Seven
- c. Eight

### GLORIA GRAHAME: Five biographies to be won

WIN

An iconic figure of *film noir*, Gloria Grahame's talents were showcased in classics including *In a Lonely Place*, *The Big Heat* and *The Bad and the Beautiful*. This comprehensive overview of Gloria Grahame's life and work by Robert J. Lentz (published by McFarland & Co) examines each of her feature films

in detail, as well as her made-for-television productions, her television series appearances and stage career. Grahame's acting performances were affected by her tumultuous personal life – including four marriages – which is also discussed. We have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

**Q. Which one of these film musicals did Gloria Grahame star in?**

- a. Carousel
- b. Oklahoma!
- c. South Pacific



## HOW TO ENTER

Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'Animation Book', 'London Film Festival tickets', 'Ealing Studio DVDs' or 'Gloria Grahame biography' in the subject heading, to: [s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk](mailto:s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk). Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'Animation Book competition', 'London Film Festival tickets competition', 'Ealing Studios DVDs competition' or 'Gloria Grahame biography competition'; *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

**The deadline for the LFF tickets competition is Monday 17 October.**  
**The deadline for all other competitions is Tuesday 11 October.**

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- \* The winners of the London Film Festival competition will be picked and notified by Monday 17 October.
- \* The prizewinners of all competitions will be picked at random and notified within ten days of the closing date.
- \* Employees of the BFI or companies related to the competitions are ineligible to enter.
- \* Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash.
- \* The BFI may wish to contact you to keep you informed of future events. Please indicate on your email/postcard if you do not wish to hear from the BFI regarding any other BFI promotions or news.

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# KEN LOACH

## THE SOCIAL NAVIGATOR

*Ken Loach's work has become a byword for a brand of naturalistic, socially conscious British filmmaking. But there's more to him than that says **John Hill**, looking back over some of the director's lesser-known early films as the BFI launches a major retrospective. Overleaf, **Michael Brooke** rediscovers a lost 1969 Loach, while **Antonia Bird**, **Luc Dardenne**, **Nell Dunn**, **Tony Garnett**, **Jimmy McGovern** and others pay tribute to his work*



**PIECES OF HISTORY**  
Much of the pioneering 1960s and 70s TV work by Ken Loach, opposite, has been difficult to see, including 'Days of Hope', top, and 'Diary of a Young Man', below



**K**en Loach, who turned 75 in June, first entered television in 1963. Since then he has been responsible for over 50 television plays, documentaries and films, and he continues to make a film virtually every year. No history of British film and television over the last 40 years can fail to acknowledge the significance of works such as *Up the Junction* (1965), *Cathy Come Home* (1966), *Kes* (1969), *Days of Hope* (1975), *Riff-Raff* (1991), *Raining Stones* (1993), *Land and Freedom* (1995), *My Name Is Joe* (1998), *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) and *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006). The last few years have seen the DVD release of two box-sets entitled *The Ken Loach Collection*, and even half-forgotten films such as *Family Life* (1971) and *Black Jack* (1979) have made a welcome reappearance.

Loach's work now seems as well known as it's ever been, but the very fact that he has made so much means, almost inevitably, that we tend to hold a selective view of it. This is particularly true of his work for television, much of which has been difficult or even impossible to see. When Loach joined the BBC in 1963, it was still not common practice to retain recordings of TV programmes. It's therefore testimony to the quality of his work that so much of it has survived. Some of it, however, does appear to have gone forever, including the very first piece he directed: *Catherine* (1964), an experimental TV play dealing with the break-up of a marriage starring Kika Markham and Tony Garnett (later Loach's producer on a number of key works). One of the episodes Loach directed for the groundbreaking series *Diary of a Young Man* (1964) was only discovered in the last few years while another (Episode Three – 'Marriage, or For Better or Worse') remains lost. Even one of his productions for the famous *Wednesday Play* series, *Wear a Very Big Hat* (1965), starring Neville Smith as an aggrieved Liverpool mod, is missing.

Unless some industrious BBC archivist uncovers copies of them, these productions are destined to remain unknown to all but those who saw them at the time of their transmission. What's also surprising, however, is how difficult it has been to see the TV material that did survive. At the time of writing, the only one of Loach's TV works available on DVD is his heartrending tale of homelessness *Cathy Come Home*. While some dramas (such as *Up the Junction*) have enjoyed an occasional TV repeat, a major series such as *Days of Hope* – responsible for igniting both public controversies and academic debates – has not been shown on TV since 1978.

This month's release of the box-set *Ken Loach at the BBC* (including *Cathy Come Home*, *Up the Junction*, *Days of Hope* and six other works) looks set to remedy this situation – but only partly so, given that it will not include important works such as *Diary of a Young Man*, *The Coming Out Party* (1965) and *The Golden Vision* (1968). Meanwhile his work for commercial television – particularly the documentaries he made for Central Television and Channel 4 in the early 1980s – remains inaccessible. In the wake of the election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979, Loach decided it was more important to make documentaries than drama, given how long it could take to bring fictional films to fruition. This decision resulted in the production of a four-part series about trade-union democracy, *Questions of Leadership* (1983). Even though Loach



agreed to cuts, Channel 4 refused to transmit any of these programmes and they have remained close to impossible to see ever since (partly because, unlike with most of Loach's work, even the National Film and Television Archive has not held copies of them).

It is of course extraordinary that so much of the work of Britain's leading filmmaker should have proved so difficult to see. This partly reflects the uncompromising bent of Loach's politics that has led him straight into controversy and battles over censorship. But it also reflects the relative lack of cultural status of TV in comparison to film. Loach himself has consistently rejected the idea that there is any fundamental difference between making work for TV and cinema. Virtually from the beginning of his TV career, his productions involved the use of film; along with the producer Tony Garnett, he fought to have shooting on 16mm accepted as a legitimate way of making TV drama. *In Two Minds* (1967) was his first production for TV to be shot entirely on film, and thereafter all his TV 'plays' were, in effect, films. Indeed, Garnett was so convinced of the cinematic qualities of *In Two Minds* that he explored the possibility of showing it in cinemas, and only failed to do so in face of opposition from within the BBC.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Loach's fellow director Stephen Frears declared at the time of the transmission of *Days of Hope* – subtitled "four films from the Great War to the General Strike" – that there was simply no British cinema film of comparable importance then being made. Ironically, Loach and Garnett had originally planned that the second film in the series would be made for cinema release but, due to the state of the British film industry at the time, had failed to raise the necessary funding. Despite both the popularity and clear cinematic ambitions of Loach's TV films, it's precisely because they did not appear in cinemas that they have so often been ignored in historical accounts of British film.

### Transcending realism

The separation of Loach's television films from his later work made for the cinema (though still commonly funded by TV companies) has also had an impact on the critical perception of his films. Loach has, of course, consistently chosen to use TV and film as a way of drawing attention to the social and political situation of 'ordinary' people at the bottom of the social ladder. He has also attempted to do so by employing methods of filmmaking that he regards as faithful to the actuality of people's

## It is extraordinary that so much of the work of Britain's leading filmmaker should have proved so difficult to see

lives. As a result, the most common terms employed to describe Loach's work have been 'realism', 'naturalism' and 'documentary drama'.

It would, of course, be absurd to claim that Loach does not belong to an international tradition of realist filmmaking. But the characterisation of Loach's 'realism' has often been highly simplistic, playing down the 'artistry' involved and reducing it to a single formula or method. If we take the long view of Loach's career, examining his film and TV work together, it soon becomes clear just how varied – and how far removed from the stereotyped conception of a 'Loach' film – some of it has actually been.

Take the following example. A woman dressed only in her underwear inspects a band of Grenadier Guards, along with various other characters from her past, who subsequently pursue her across open ground. When she falls down a well-like hole, her pursuers peer down at her while a teleprinter at the bottom of the screen reports on the absence of a meaning to life. The woman then wraps the rope that has been thrown to her around her neck, before being pulled to her death. You could be forgiven for thinking that this unsettling dream sequence might be the work of a Bergman or Fellini (or at least someone heavily under their influence). In fact, it is part of Episode Five ('Life, or A Girl Called Fred') of *Diary of a Young Man*, one of Loach's contributions to Troy Kennedy Martin and John McGrath's picaresque tale of a young northerner on the make in London.

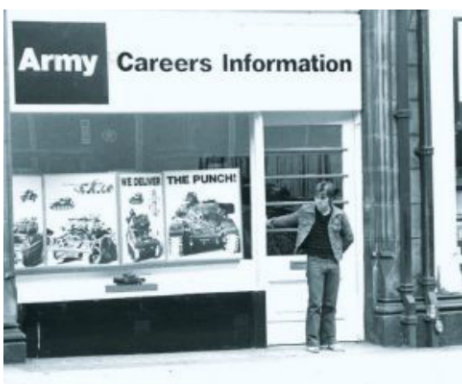
The series was accompanied by a manifesto, written by Kennedy Martin, calling for a break with TV 'naturalism', and the episodes directed by Loach remain startling for the way in which they appropriate devices adapted from Brecht, Eisenstein and contemporary European art cinema. Although realism and modernism are commonly counterposed in critical writing, Loach's early work straddles the two, drawing on a variety of elements taken not only from documentary but also from the tradition of 'film art', from Soviet montage through to the *nouvelle vague*. Thus while *Up the Junction* is rightly remembered for its controversial tackling of contemporary social issues such

as abortion, it's also a formally audacious work that Tony Garnett referred to at the time as "not a play, a documentary or a musical" but "all of these at once". The same might be said of Loach's 1965 TV play *The End of Arthur's Marriage*, a Brechtian musical and satire co-written by Christopher Logue and Stanley Myers, in which a youthful John Fortune literally sings the praises of an over-priced watch and the main characters purchase an elephant from London Zoo before leading an impromptu procession of Lambretta-riding mods.

Those were bold but ragged experiments that are almost overloaded with ideas and invention. More disciplined but no less memorable is *In Two Minds*, Loach's first go at filming David Mercer's screenplay about schizophrenia. Influenced by the ideas of the radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing, the film sets out to suggest how schizophrenia is less an identifiable physical illness than a label employed by the medical establishment to pathologise certain kinds of social condition. At first glance the film might seem to be heavily indebted to documentary, making use of interview techniques associated with a popular documentary series such as *Man Alive*. But the interviews in this case are being conducted by an unseen psychiatrist (or Laing surrogate), and the 'look' of the camera oscillates between the 'objective' standpoint of the imaginary TV interview and the 'subjective' point of view of the observing doctor. Even more radically, the psychiatrist departs the film halfway through, whereupon the camera – entirely unexpectedly – assumes the point of view of his former patient.

It was the wish of both Mercer and Laing that the experience of madness should be invested with a proper meaning, and one of the ways in which the film sets out to achieve this is through its use of subjective camera and stylised *mise en scène*. As a result, *In Two Minds* ends up looking much less like a documentary than a film by Bergman or Resnais (who himself later worked with Mercer on *Providence*), in which the boundaries between objective and subjective modes of perception have become blurred.

Loach did, of course, go on to remake *In Two Minds* for the cinema as *Family Life*, but it's a rela-



tively flattened-out version of the earlier film, in which many of the features that made *In Two Minds* so extraordinary – extreme close-ups, zooms, disorienting point-of-view shots, jump cuts, stylised compositions, interior monologues – are abandoned in favour of a more measured observational style. While *Family Life* remains a powerful and moving film in its own right, there does seem to be a strong case for arguing that it's the relatively unknown Loach TV film rather than its made-for-cinema counterpart that's the more artistically complex and exhilarating.

## Blurring boundaries

What *In Two Minds* also indicates is how complicated Loach's negotiation of devices associated with documentary has been. It was, of course, the supposed mixing of fact and fiction in *Cathy Come Home* that sparked a controversy regarding the legitimacy of the documentary-drama form. Although the play was based on writer Jeremy Sandford's research into homelessness, the production itself mainly employed devices that were reminiscent of documentary – location shooting, casual camerawork, voiceovers – rather than what could be said to constitute 'genuine' documentary material. What made Loach's later *The Golden Vision* particularly unusual, therefore, was that it really did mix documentary and fiction.

Written by Neville Smith (with some help from ITN newscaster Gordon Honeycombe), the film follows the lives of a group of fanatical Everton supporters, whose passion for football takes precedence over the most fundamental events in the life cycle (birth, marriage and death). While the fans are fictional characters, played with great gusto by a cast of local club entertainers, the film also intercuts its fictional scenes with specially filmed footage of Everton personnel, including the club director John Moores, the manager Harry Catterick and the "golden vision" of the film's title, the Scottish centre forward Alex Young. While the genial nature of the film's comedy successfully immunised it against the kind of criticisms that had been directed at *Cathy Come Home*, the way in which it employs overlapping sound and montage to run together factual and fictional material actually makes *The Golden Vision* the more formally transgressive work.

Although it was a common complaint of the time that Loach's appropriation of documentary devices perpetrated some kind of fraud on the spectator, a more useful perspective would be to identify how a work such as *The Golden Vision* explicitly

**YOUTHFUL PROMISE**  
From the start Loach's work has focused on the condition of the young in Britain, in such works as, from left, 'The Golden Vision', 'Looks and Smiles' and 'Up the Junction'

## OUT OF SIGHT OUT OF MIND

*Forty years after it was suppressed, a controversial Loach film is finally seeing the light of day.* By **Michael Brooke**

In 1969 two distinguished British directors named Ken made films for television that would not only rank amongst their most controversial works, but also raised troubling questions about the limits that can be placed on creative endeavour by copyright holders and sponsors. Ken Russell's deliberately provocative Richard Strauss biopic *Dance of the Seven Veils* did at least get a single BBC broadcast in February 1970, before the Strauss estate made its views wrathfully clear. It has not been screened legally since, a ban that notionally exists until the relevant copyrights expire at the end of 2019.

By contrast, Ken Loach's documentary never got beyond the rough-cut stage, and there's no onscreen title: over the years, it's been referred to as *In Black and White* or simply *The Save the Children Fund Film*. It was jointly funded by the SCF and London Weekend Television, and intended for screening by the latter. But after viewing Loach's initial cut, the SCF refused to endorse the film, asked LWT to write off their investment, and even sought to have the negative destroyed.

So what caused the problem? The film was commissioned to mark the SCF's 50th anniversary, and intended to present examples of its work in the UK and Africa. Loach filmed the first part in Blackburn without incident. He then flew to Nairobi, where an American-born teacher at the fund's flagship school, Starehe, claimed that the school was essentially grooming its pupils to become pro-British members of an artificial new middle class. As the director described the situation to Graham Fuller for the book *Loach on Loach*: "The kids were being given a Western education, wore Western clothes and got up every morning and saluted the British flag. The libraries were full of cast-off books from the public schools, so you'd find Biggles and P.G. Wodehouse in a library for African kids. The headmaster was a guy who had the record for shooting more Mau Mau than anyone else."

Since Kenya had been independent since 1963, Loach interpreted this as a form of British neocolonialism, and accordingly devoted much of the documentary's second half to the subject, before concluding that Kenya would benefit from a genuine socialist revolution.

Neither the tone nor the content (the film opens with a quotation from Friedrich Engels) should have come as a surprise to anyone familiar with Loach's political views. Although this was his first out-and-out documentary, he had previously included non-fiction elements in the BBC plays *Up the Junction* and *Cathy Come Home*, and the latter in particular was seen as a campaigning film, the charity Shelter being a key beneficiary. While Loach could legiti-



### CHILDREN'S HOUR

Loach's documentary depicted the Save the Children Fund's work in Kenya as neocolonialist

mately be accused of biting the hand that was feeding him (the film was effectively useless as the intended promotional and fundraising vehicle), he seems to have been under the impression that because LWT had put up most of the budget, a genuine investigative documentary would be the most worthwhile way of spending it.

Loach's regular producer Tony Garnett was apparently unaware of the content of the film until Loach returned from Africa with the raw footage, whereupon he quickly realised that he had a major problem on his hands, not least because he would be the one having to deal with the ensuing fallout. At one point Garnett was seriously worried that he might be sued by the SCF, and that they would succeed in having the negative destroyed. Ultimately, while the film was never shown, Garnett successfully negotiated a compromise whereby all the material generated by the project (film stock and associated paperwork) was stored in the vaults of the BFI National Archive, where it has remained since 1971.

This was Loach's first experience of serious censorship, an issue that would blight much of his career in the 1980s when he resumed his documentary output with a series of television films about the trade-union movement and the miners' strike, some of which were extensively edited before transmission, others of which were not shown at all.

Over 40 years on, the SCF finally seems to have relented. At time of writing, the film's first public screening is scheduled for 1 September as part of the Loach retrospective at BFI Southbank, though some legal issues still need to be straightened out first. As the world premiere of a 'lost' film by a major British auteur, it will be shown in a very different context to the single late-night ITV screening that was originally planned, though at least now there's no chance of anyone mistaking it for an hour-long SCF infomercial.

## Ken Loach

engages in an active appropriation and hybridisation of a variety of filmmaking conventions. Thus while the film does, in part, seek to invest its drama with the authenticity of documentary, it does so in a way that leaves room for elements of both formal playfulness and fantasy. It's surely a rather unusual form of 'documentary drama' that ends with one of the central fictional characters coming on as a substitute at Goodison Park and scoring the winning goal for his beloved team.

Although rarely discussed in studies of Loach's oeuvre, *The Golden Vision* is nevertheless one of his most accomplished and straightforwardly enjoyable works (anticipating his recent, similarly playful football film *Looking for Eric*). It has, however, been overshadowed by the film that he went on to make shortly afterwards. Written by Barry Hines and shot by Chris Menges, *Kes* is probably the best known of all the director's works, and the one that came to define his evolving style. Although it contains all sorts of odd and quirky elements that hark back to his earlier work, *Kes* is generally regarded as marking a new turn in Loach's filmmaking. As Loach himself explained, he wanted to achieve a more sympathetic way of looking at his subject-matter, dispensing with the overt narrational devices of his earlier work in favour of a less interventionist approach to capturing action that involved positioning the camera further back from the actors and permitting scenes to play out more organically.

As a result, his films acquired a quieter, more meditative tone – despite their often increasingly radical political outlook. This can be seen, for example, in a later collaboration with Neville Smith, *After a Lifetime* (1971). Made for London Weekend Television, this film, like other Loach works, fell victim to cuts and delays, partly as a result of its sympathy for the political radicalism underpinning the General Strike of 1926. Dealing with the death of a political activist, the predominant mood is however elegiac rather than polemical as the film gently – and often humorously – observes the different ways in which the dead man's family and friends respond to his loss.

Something similar might also be said of *Days of Hope* which, by virtue of its open advocacy of revolutionary politics, could arguably be said to be the most radical TV drama ever to have been shown on British television. It certainly irked the conservative press of the time (which attacked its "left-wingery") as well as the BBC management, who fretted over its lack of balance. But while it would be difficult not to notice the film's political sympathy,

it is hardly the piece of agitprop that some of the fevered critical reactions suggested.

Loach himself indicated how he had sought to make "a measured, thoughtful film" that would "allow time" for its contents "to register". This was partly accomplished through the unhurried pacing of the series, its downplaying of spectacle and adoption of a distanced, observational viewpoint composed of shots that are held for longer than would normally be expected. Loach's style is sometimes criticised as no more than a vehicle for political messages, but it's also possible to see how his films of this period constitute a kind of 'slow cinema' based on patient observation of the ordinary and undramatic, even when supposedly dealing with extraordinary and dramatic historical events.

Indeed, by the time he made his 1981 cinema feature *Looks and Smiles*, Loach was becoming concerned that his approach to filmmaking had, in fact, become too "lethargic" and "arty-farty". Only recently available to view once more on YouTube, *Looks and Smiles* has hitherto been one of Loach's most neglected works. But looked at again, it's hardly the disappointment that Loach's own comments might suggest. Written by Barry Hines, the film was partly conceived as a follow-up to *Kes*; it follows the exploits of a young working-class lad as he searches in vain for the job that will keep him off the dole.

Shot in luminous black and white by the great Chris Menges, *Looks and Smiles* mixes elements of both European art cinema and British social realism as it evokes the frustration and ennui of life without a job, while also sustaining a strong sense of social and physical context. The film's rich visual imagery of Sheffield's public spaces not only captures the reality of a city facing economic decline, but also suggests the inner mental landscape of the characters who live there. As it turned out, *Looks and Smiles* was to prove to be Loach's last feature for a number of years, as he decided to concentrate instead on documentary production. It is, however, one of a number of early Loach films that not only remind us how good his work can be, but also encourage us to question how much of it we can truly lay claim to know.

■ John Hill's book *'Ken Loach: The Politics of Film and Television'* is published by BFI Publishing. The DVD box-set *'Ken Loach at the BBC'* is out now. *'Kes'* is rereleased in cinemas on 9 September. A Ken Loach retrospective plays until 12 October at BFI Southbank, London

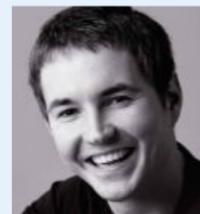
**FEATHERED FRIEND**  
David Bradley as Billy in *'Kes'*, still Loach's best-known film – and an inspiration for Luc Dardenne, facing page



## ON LOACH

What is he like to work with? How have his films influenced others? Collaborators and admirers pay tribute to Ken Loach

## COLLABORATORS



### MARTIN COMPSTON

You never see the script with Ken – he gives you a page day by day, so you have no idea how the film ends. It's a very useful tool, in that it keeps you excited. Sometimes, if you know

what's happening next, you let your energy drop, but when you don't know, you can't wait to get your hand on that piece of paper. Sometimes he doesn't give you anything – he's famed for the little curveballs he throws to the actors. But they're not gratuitous. They're to get the best reaction possible. Martin Compston has acted in Loach's films *'Sweet Sixteen'* and *'Tickets'*

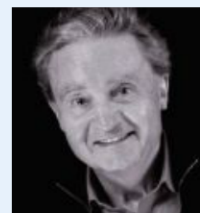


### NELL DUNN

I was living in Battersea and working in a sweet factory, trying to be a writer and having lots of stuff turned down. *Up the Junction* [her 1963 short-story collection] is about people living in Battersea, working in factories, working in bag washes, working in the candle factory at the bottom of the road, going to the wash-house to wash their clothes, going swimming in Tooting Bec open-air pool, and having fun. It's about being young. I was just writing down what I heard and describing what I saw in quite an immediate way.

The process of adaptation [into a TV play] was pretty simple. I wandered about Battersea with Ken, showing him the things that I loved. The labour was divided pretty simply: he was in charge of everything to do with structure, and I was in charge of dialogue. So he would say, "We need more dialogue here" or "We need a link," and I would try and do it. Ken's *Up the Junction* did feel like a film of the book. But he was totally in charge of making it into a whole thing rather than little jagged bits and pieces.

Nell Dunn worked with Loach as the writer of *'Up the Junction'*



### TONY GARNETT

*The Wednesday Play* was my first job behind the camera. We put on 30-something feature film-length single dramas in a year. When we got into production, we needed a lot of directors, and Ken was one of them.

Ken and I got to know each other, and got closer and closer. We were clearly overlapping both polit-

ically and aesthetically. I'd met him earlier, because I'd acted in a studio television play directed by Ken called *Catherine*. He was a very young, inexperienced director, so I got virtually no direction from him. One of the things I regret is that he has seen me acting, and I never got the chance to see him acting, which has meant he's been able to send me up for decades, and I've not been able to return it. He'd given up acting by then.

So we became good friends during the course of the first *Wednesday Play* series. *Up the Junction* was a series of loosely connected vignettes of teenage people in South London. What attracted me and Ken first of all was the authenticity. It just rang true – Nell [Dunn]'s writing is like that. And there's something very poignant, very moving about the sheer energy of teenagers. It was irresistible material, perfect for what Ken is good at, and he made a very good job of it.

There were some techniques used which were probably novel to most of our audience. One of the things Ken and I would talk about was post-war Italian cinema. We were very enamoured of many of the films coming out of Eastern Europe. We were quite fond of Brecht, too. So there was some attempt, on the one hand, to draw an audience emotionally into the predicament of the characters, but on the other, we didn't want them to wallow in that. We wanted them to judge.

**Tony Garnett produced several of Loach's TV plays, including 'Cathy Come Home' and 'In Two Minds', and features, including 'Kes' and 'Family Life'**



#### JONATHAN MORRIS

I first started working with Ken in 1980. I was very young. He was allocated me, and wasn't particularly happy about it. I was a staff editor at ATV, which became Central Television, in Elstree. It was on a documentary called *Auditions* about three young dancers in search of work.

The difference about working on a Ken Loach film... is that the actors are given freedom. They don't have to hit marks. Actors can go and pretty much do as they feel, so if they're drinking or smoking they don't have to take a drag on a cigarette at a particular moment, so the problems are really continuity, which is why Ken tends to shoot quite a few takes. But of course what we get is a great performance, because there's no hang-ups about what they've got to do, or whether they've got to put on a strange accent.

**Jonathan Morris has edited many Ken Loach films over the last 30 years, including 'Raining Stones', 'Land and Freedom' and 'The Wind That Shakes the Barley'**

## WRITERS AND DIRECTORS



#### ANTONIA BIRD

For me he's a hero, because he's stuck to his beliefs. He's made films about things that matter deeply to our society, and he's continuously done it through his career. I found

*The Navigators* [2001] the most profoundly moving piece of television drama – probably the best in the last 15 years. It was about something that was real, it was beautifully made, the acting was great, and it was completely captivating and engaging. It wasn't boring or banging it on the head – it was entering into people's world and lives and work.

During the 1980s, when nobody would employ him, he made a documentary called *The Red and the Blue* [1982]. It's so simple: he just filmed at the Labour party conference and Tory party conference, but the way he edited and intercut between the two was world-class. It opened my eyes to what you can do with documentary material, without voiceover, without telling the audience what to think or what to feel.

**Antonia Bird is the director of 'The Hamburg Cell', 'Face' and 'Priest'**



#### LUC DARDENNE

The first Ken Loach film I saw was *Family Life*, in 1973 or 74. I remember feeling indignation at [the girl's] situation, and compassion and comradeship for her. I've always admired this

film – its immediacy, urgency and freedom.

In the mid-70s I also saw *Kes*. Its sudden ending – the boy burying his kestrel – is unforgettable. This boy and his bird stay with you for a long time after the film is over. Another moment in that film that my brother [co-director Jean-Pierre Dardenne] and I often talk about is the football-match scene, with the PE teacher [Brian Glover] who sees himself as Bobby Charlton. It's marvellous! Only Ken Loach could film that.

But the film of his I most admire is *Raining Stones*, a dense film, penetrating and accurate in its realism. It's a masterpiece. It manages to denounce the brutal exploitation of the underclasses, their humiliation, and at the same time to identify their refusal of divine justice in that magnificent scene where the priest absolves Bob of murder. Loach's characters come from the same background as ours, even if his perspective on their situations is more 'political' than ours.

**Luc Dardenne is the co-writer and co-director of 'Rosetta', 'The Son' and 'The Child'**



#### PETER KOSMINSKY

Watching *Days of Hope* was the single thing that most powerfully motivated me to become a filmmaker. What struck me at the time was the power of the medium as he demon-

strated it. There was one particular scene: no speeches, no exposition – it was purely done through a raucous scene of soldiers in a pub, and the transformation caused by a song. All you wanted to know about what was really going on in the minds of these young recruits – really little more than potential cannon fodder, and they knew it by that stage of [World War I] – had just been laid bare, far more eloquently than could have been done in an article or a novel.

**Peter Kosminsky is the writer-director of 'The Promise', 'Britz' and 'The Government Inspector'**



#### JIMMY MCGOVERN

TV drama at its best convinces you that what you're seeing on screen is actually happening. And there's nobody better than Ken for that. Just the reek of authenticity – it's that

that makes him stand out.

That big scene in *Land and Freedom*, where they talk about collectivising the land and how they're going to organise it – it's just a debate. Every rule in the book says you cut that scene. I would never attempt to write that scene. And yet you watch it, and it's mesmerising. That's because of the way he's cast it – he's got people who've lived it. They look real, they sound real, it means a lot to them.

Another scene: in *Riff-Raff*, with Ricky Tomlinson in a bath, and the Arab women walk in. Afterwards Ricky says, "They don't see much of the old white sausage over there, do they?" I'm watching this with my mouth open. That's not politically correct in any way whatsoever, but it's so human and so funny. Ken can be so political, but he can portray the working class as they are.

I'd do anything for Ken. I've tried to get him – I've planned strategies to get him – but he does his own thing with his own people. I'd give my right arm to work with him, but I think every other writer would as well.

**Jimmy McGovern is the writer of 'Hillsborough' and the writer/creator of 'Cracker' and 'The Street'**

*Interviews by Mark Duguid, Ed McGown, Geoffrey Macnab and Gemma Starkey. Full versions of these interviews and more are available at [www.bfi.org.uk](http://www.bfi.org.uk)*

*Interviewing Lars von Trier about his dreamily apocalyptic new film 'Melancholia', **Nick James** was under strict instruction not to broach the subject of Nazism. But the Danish controversialist had other ideas*

# THE CONFESSIONS OF LARS VON TRIER





**W**hen several British journalists came to Zentropa's Filmbyen studio complex outside Copenhagen to interview Lars von Trier in July, it seemed as if everyone else was on holiday. We had lunch in the canteen along with a very amiable skeleton staff, including von Trier, and if we'd all sat packed together, we wouldn't have filled one of its three very long tables.

While von Trier took a post-prandial power nap, I was given the tour. Every part of the complex looked like a set for a film that had already been shot: the jazz band's instruments in place for a performance at one end of the canteen, the huge wall behind them festooned with awards, the logo-decorated swimming pool with its transparent covering, the infamous gnomes for pissing on, looking parched and flaky. It feels like a remarkably creative place, but even outside the holiday

period it's no longer working at full stretch, I'm told. Parts have been sold off to other companies. Yet von Trier's personality is expressed everywhere you look. The production rooms are all named after communist fighters. There's a sense of an extremely benign authority with a schoolboy sense of humour behind it all. When you finally get to the separate building where von Trier himself is to be found sitting on a sofa, it all makes sense as a realised fantasy of how a film studio ought to look – except that it's so quiet.

I'd come to talk to von Trier about his new film *Melancholia*, and I'd been specifically asked by publicists not to press him on his infamous Cannes press-conference debacle. Given that the issues raised on that occasion are of little relevance to the new film, I've dealt with them separately (see p.33). But as it happens, von Trier himself brought up the subject of his expressed sympathy for Hitler. He makes his own defence, and you must make of it what you will. Our conversation



was pleasant and a little tentative, but I didn't realise until I transcribed my recording how much it reveals a von Trier on edge.

The first part of *Melancholia* is named after Justine (Kirsten Dunst), an advertising copywriter who enters a state of depression on what is meant to be the happiest day of her life: her wedding day. The film follows the elaborate celebration as it slowly disintegrates. The second part is devoted to Justine's sister Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg) as her family watches an approaching planet called Melancholia that, according to Claire's hotelier husband John (Kiefer Sutherland), is due to pass close by the Earth – except that we've already seen the collision in a prologue.

That prologue is made up of ultra slow-mo images shot by the super-fast Phantom camera. We see Justine on the lawn in her wedding dress, the two sisters with Claire's son Leo (Cameron Spur) arrayed like chess pieces, and Leo whittling a stick in the woods. These and other images establish a mood of curious foreboding. They are meant to represent what Justine foresees in her melancholic state. The 'Justine' section becomes a parade of dysfunctional encounters between the bride and her wedding guests: Claire, John, her dissolute father Dexter (John Hurt), her dismissive mother Gaby (Charlotte Rampling), her new husband Michael (Alexander Skarsgård), her advertising-company boss Jack (Stellan Skarsgård) and his new employee Tim (Brady Corbet). The 'Claire' section is a battle in mood between Claire's anxiety, John's certitude and Justine's will to doom. But the plot, as we shall see, is not what matters to von Trier.

**Nick James:** Since you show the end of the world in the first five minutes of 'Melancholia', let's start at the end.

**Lars von Trier:** Endings are the not so interesting part of a film. Everybody loves beginnings because they can take any form. The film I'm working on now, *The Nymphomaniac*, is inspired by the fact that I'm reading again: Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann and Marcel Proust. Films today are more or less reduced to the storyline, [whereas] the greater the novel, the less it will touch on that. Who cares if, in a film, the butler did it? You're not a different person when you leave the cinema. That's why Hitchcock chose not to make whodunnits. It's a curse on today's films that dramaturgists take anything away that doesn't relate to the storyline. It would be a great pleasure for me to do a really messy film.

## PRELUDE AND FUGUE

The eerie opening of 'Melancholia' shows sisters Justine (Kirsten Dunst, left) and Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg, right) in slow motion on the lawn

**NJ:** With a lot of talking in it?

**LvT:** With a lot of talking in it. I love people to talk and I see [*The Nymphomaniac*] as a lot of porn, a lot of philosophy. A tremendously long film.

**NJ:** 'Melancholia' is divided into two parts named after the sisters Justine and Claire. Does that mean that you were already thinking about the Marquis de Sade before 'The Nymphomaniac'?

**LvT:** I have read [de Sade's novel] *Justine* and some of the smaller works, but not *Juliette*. I don't know if anybody's read *Juliette* – it's 700 pages. *Justine* talks about the good sister and is only 72 pages. When it comes to the evil sister, he could kind of go on forever.

**NJ:** Did writing the part of your Justine, a depressive like yourself, come more naturally than writing Claire?

**LvT:** There are different ways of writing and one is to divide yourself up into different characters, and that's probably what I've done. But I feel as close to Justine as I did to the Charlotte Gainsbourg part in *Antichrist* [2009]. Whenever I write a film, I write about myself and I might divide myself into two men and then write some terrible female cliché parts that are idiots or idealists or both. Just before I make the film, I switch the sexes around. No man today will stand up and say, "The male parts are a little clichéd," whereas a woman will say it straight away. Even though I'm not trying to make the characters female, that's what I end up doing. I'm not making an effort to make them female, I'm giving them some conceptual idea of who they are, because it's a concept I have for myself, and that makes it more believable.

**NJ:** Was it difficult for you to get through making a film about depression?

**LvT:** This is the film I've had the most fun doing. That it had to do with the end of the world and

depression doesn't matter. This was one of the most fun shoots, mainly because we were drinking a lot. I stopped after that, but everybody had a fantastic time and Kirsten was happy because she was set free compared to the other stuff she's done, and everybody felt quite good in this strange Swedish hotel that we lived in.

**NJ:** That hotel is fascinating – your opening images, taken with the Phantom camera, make people look like chess pieces in that very formal garden.

**LvT:** It was a gift, because the film is inspired by many different things – but especially by *The Philadelphia Story*. To find a place like that was difficult, but we found this place instead and suddenly it looked very like *Last Year in Marienbad*. It was by chance that the topiary was there. The original idea was to spread these monumental, slow-motion pictures throughout the film, but then I had the idea of doing it as a prelude. I tend to like films where you know how it ends.

**NJ:** It's a gift to journalists too. We can say that the world ends without giving anything away.

**LvT:** But what's interesting about that as a spectator is that you still hope it doesn't end. You see the Titanic and then you see an iceberg and you hope that it will somehow miss it. It's ridiculous, but probably part of human nature.

**NJ:** These opening images vary from representations of events, like the boy whittling a tree branch, to seeing Justine in her wedding dress with creepers dragging at her feet, which is more a description of her mentality.

**LvT:** The idea was that it should all be images that were inside her mind somehow, and that she had knowledge of what would happen. In the old times when you talked about melancholic persons, they were considered to know more than the rest of us.

**NJ:** It's also often said that melancholia is a spur to creativity.

**LvT:** Melancholia is like salt to a dish. If you have a work of art with no melancholia, you're missing something. Salt can really change and enlarge the flavours. Melancholia is such a fantastic word because it's negative and positive, and it has something to do with longing. I have a great postcard here of a painting by Jens Ferdinand Willumsen called *The Terror of Nature*. It's interesting how all the stuff that I like and you like and I'm sure most of us like has this little melancholia substance in it.

**NJ:** The first half of the film has many resemblances to Thomas Vinterberg's 'Festen' (1998).

**'This is the film I've had the most fun doing. That it had to do with the end of the world doesn't matter'**

# PERSONA NON GRATA

Lars von Trier's controversial outburst in Cannes this year was not entirely out of character, finds **Nick James**

Before I went to Copenhagen in July to interview Lars von Trier, I had never met the director, but he and his films had been the cause of a few flashpoints in my professional life. Once, in a flippant mood, I asked the much-missed actress Katrin Cartlidge (she died young in 2002), who had then just returned from the set of *Breaking the Waves*, if von Trier wasn't a little mad. She jumped so far down my throat that I felt like a dyspeptic snake. Her loyalty to him has been echoed by other British members of his crews I've met.

One of the most memorable editions of Cannes I've attended was in 2000, when *Dancer in the Dark* became the subject of fierce debate. The generations of critics divided right down the middle. Veterans thought it inept as a musical – Philip French of *The Observer*, for instance, was full of loathing for it – but several young British reviewers argued fiercely in its favour. (For me it was a patchy experimental success.) In 2009, the day after my Cannes room-mate Jonathan Romney had panned *Antichrist*, I goaded him, insisting that if he really wanted to annoy von Trier he should have given it a “middling” review.

All this illustrates that it's not only filmmakers who say stupid or provocative things at film festivals. But what von Trier said at the Cannes press conference for *Melancholia* earlier this year was in a different league. He said: “For a long time I thought I was a Jew and I was happy to be a Jew. Then I met [Danish Jewish director] Susanne Bier and I wasn't so happy. But then I found out I was actually a Nazi. My family were German, and that also gave me some pleasure. What can I say? I understand Hitler. He did some wrong things, yes absolutely, but I can see him sitting there in his bunker at the end... I sympathise with him, yes, a little bit... I don't mean I'm in favour of World War II, and I am not against Jews, not even Susanne Bier. I am very much in favour of them. All Jews. Well, Israel is a pain in the ass but... how can I get out of this sentence... OK, I'm a Nazi.”

Despite most of the film critics present thinking it was just another instance of von Trier trying too hard to provoke and talking himself into a corner, this speech got him declared *persona non grata* by the festival.

It's a kind of provocation that I'm familiar with. In punk clubs in the 1970s, I knew teenagers who wore Nazi stuff purely to wind up well-meaning liberal hippies. They all stopped when the truly Nazi skinhead thug bands came on to the scene. The David Bowie-era art-school generation (my own) was all too open to the “fascinating fascism” trend identified by Susan Sontag. Bowie himself had a brief period of reputedly cocaine-fuelled fascist fantasies; Bryan Ferry has said unfortunate



**FAUX PAS** Kirsten Dunst, right, looks on during Lars von Trier's ill-fated Cannes press conference; elsewhere he has expressed enthusiasm for 'The Night Porter', top

things about Nazi imagery. Nazis remain a focal point for satire. As I write, the *Jake or Dinos Chapman* show at the White Cube gallery in Mayfair has a room full of skeleton dummies wearing black SS-style uniforms with smiley face armbands. As Jake Chapman has said, they use Nazis because they're the ultimate bad guys.

You can get away with that kind of thing in London because the British have a history of savage satire, and Hitler's legions didn't make it across the channel. But it's quite impossible for the French to tolerate such provocation. Perhaps this has something to do with the war guilt the French themselves bear: during the Nazi occupation of France, French police rounded up thousands of Jews, who were held in the Vélodrome d'Hiver and the Drancy internment camp before being shipped off to Auschwitz. Add to that grim historic responsibility John Galliano's appalling anti-semitic rant in Paris last February when he was the creative director of the classic French fashion house Christian Dior, and you can see why Cannes took von Trier's words so seriously.

Quotations from the director in Stig Björkman's interview book *Trier on von Trier* might, if read



harshly, implicate him further in the Nazi-sympathiser mire. At one point in its pages von Trier talks about his fascination with Liliana Cavani's 1974 film *The Night Porter*: “It's still a film that means a lot to me. As I said, I was very influenced by David Bowie at the time, and he used to go about in a Nazi uniform. I was trying to imitate him. It was all part of my rebellion against my mother, I think, this business of ostentatiously going about in military uniform. She'd been in the Danish resistance during the war.”

But doesn't this quote rather point to a more plausible psychology for von Trier's rambling act of career suicide in Cannes? As the book shows us, he grew up believing he was half-Jewish on his father Ulf Trier's side (although strictly speaking Jewishness is determined by the mother), but was told by his mother Inger on her deathbed that another man was in fact his biological father. His mother was a communist who brought von Trier up, he says, to be a “free individual”. She was “a firm believer in liberal childcare and in the child's right to make its own decisions... she wanted me to live up to a succession of creative and artistic ideals that she hadn't been able to achieve.” She wanted him to speak freely, but she herself hid the truth for decades. None of this excuses von Trier's jocular excesses, but it might explain why he doesn't know when he's gone too far.



➤ **LvT:** I discussed it with Thomas and we have the same references. Like me he had the party in *The Godfather* in mind, but I mainly had *The Deer Hunter*. I like *Festen* very much, but the idea of having a long party was also influenced by *The Philadelphia Story*, which is not so much about a party as before the party. That film also has this strange kind of melancholia to it.

**NJ:** 'Melancholia' is also an anti-disaster movie. Catastrophe is coming, but no one does anything to try to save the situation.

**LvT:** Somehow this planet got into the story. That's probably because I investigated the concept of melancholia. In the old times they talked about bodily fluids [the humours] and planets, and then there was a planet called Melancholia. It's obvious that if I made a disaster film – and I don't know if it is, but I have speculated a little about it – then I would not be able to do all the special effects. It would be more interesting to get closer to some people in the disaster situation than to see a lot of buildings collapse. So we have done very little. If you see the prelude as Justine's ideas about the situation, then they're much more exaggerated than they are in the film.

**NJ:** The film's romanticism is quite intense. Was Wagner always going to come into it, or was that a decision that came later?

**LvT:** At first we were looking for some melancholic music. Then I saw that it was interesting to go in a romantic direction. Any film that I make takes all that I have in me. I don't save any ideas for later. The 'Prelude' for *Tristan and Isolde* comes from reading Proust because [the characters] discuss it so much. I allowed myself to use it for the score, which is not something I would normally do. We were shoveling the same music on and on and I'm not so proud of this. I feel that I've had an extremely good time doing this film, but that I'm not really allowed to.

**NJ:** That self-thwarting is surely an aspect of a depressive personality. There's a mythological dimension to the sense of justice in 'Melancholia': Justine seems to be drawing the planet in; in her state of mind, doom is what the world deserves.

**LvT:** When you are depressed you have a feeling that it's not only you that's changed, but the whole world. This idea about the world being evil maybe comes from the film before [*Antichrist*]. The one thing that was suddenly very interesting for me

## ILL-STARRED

Claire (Gainsbourg, right), Justine (Dunst, both pics), John (Kiefer Sutherland) and Michael (Alexander Skarsgård) face impending catastrophe

was the idea that there is no life anywhere else. I've always thought, "Yes, of course there's some kind of life somewhere." But what if there's no life anywhere? We're like we are and then, click, nothing... God has no idea of repeating this ever... It was just melancholic.

**NJ:** But it's also omniscient. You're playing God yourself.

**LvT:** Yeah, but I think that life is a shitty plan. It's too evil to believe. I can understand the poor mouse that my cat is after. They don't know they're gonna die, and until the end they hope there's a way of surviving. The cat playing with the mouse is like life for real. Recently we've had several deaths in the family, very young people, and it seems so unjust. It seems like God had a good idea about life, and then he didn't do anything about it later. He didn't try to fix the things that didn't work. But this whole idea that we know we're going to die and we know that we do bad and we're not supposed to have fun at all and when we do we get a bad conscience – it seems like a terrible idea. It's an enigma. But maybe that's what good about it.

**NJ:** Every one of your films has offered some sort of provocation. Were you expecting 'Melancholia' to be more provocative than it is?

**LvT:** I see this as my kindest film, and maybe that's why I feel that I'm not allowed to enjoy it. Someone asked me about *Antichrist*: she [Charlotte Gainsbourg] cuts off her clitoris – was that just to provoke? I can only say that I don't do that. I work hard doing these films and you can destroy a film by putting something in that's just a provocation.

I am, as a person, probably provocative – but I can't help it. In my family, whenever you met, you said something provocative to start a discussion. That's probably part of me. But I also have this cultural radical thing that you have to look at all

aspects of things. She cuts off her clitoris because her clitoris represents somehow the danger of sexuality. But people have cut off clitorises before in films.

For me to say in Cannes that I'm a Nazi was also a provocation. But a very well-known writer wrote me a little poem about it and the point of it was that I said I was a Nazi, but what I meant was, "Come and play with me." No matter what provocative things you say in the world, I will claim – without knowing them all – that there will be a little bit of truth in all of them, because if you say something that's complete nonsense, then it's not provocative.

What was surprising [about Cannes] was that it was so hard on me. Not that the reaction was so hard, but that I took it so hard. I've been saying stuff like this before. Some people hate me and some people know me and actually what happened was – which I know is very spoiled – I got a little hurt, because I know that the world doesn't know me, but they should know that I'm not a Nazi.

If I'd been sitting with an interviewer like you, you would have asked, "Well, what do you mean?" Which would have helped me tremendously because then I would say, "We are all a little bit Nazi, we are all a little bit Jewish." Not to mention that, if you think it was only Hitler who was an evil person, then we have learned absolutely nothing from the whole of history. This was obvious to a lot of people that sat there, but the problem was that you only get the statement [reported]: Lars saying, "I'm a Nazi." Then everyone out there will say "asshole". It's really difficult because I don't have two persons – I don't have an official person and a private person. Maybe I could have? But that would demand so much effort that I wouldn't have time to make any films.

But you also have an obligation to challenge yourself and to challenge others. To make films is to create something that you can use in your life. The worlds that I like have this ability to make a strange connection between two things. That's why I feel there are not enough nutritious films, and the meal of *Melancholia* is maybe not good enough. There's too much double cream.

■ 'Melancholia' is released on 30 September, and is reviewed on page 70

**'I am, as a person, probably provocative... For me to say in Cannes that I'm a Nazi was also a provocation'**

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### COMING SOON:

Also in September: *The Iron Horse* (John Ford, 1924)

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*In recent years British TV has given little airtime to serious coverage of cinema. But all that is changing with the transmission of a 15-hour documentary by Mark Cousins that offers a truly global perspective. **Ian Christie** immerses himself in 'The Story of Film'*

# OUT THERE IN THE DARK





**MAN WITH A CAMERA**  
Mark Cousins shooting  
'The Story of Film' on  
location in Senegal,  
above, and with Abbas  
Kiarostami, top left



**POINTS EAST**  
Clockwise from left:  
Cousins takes a  
photograph of Ruan  
Lingyu, the 'Chinese  
Greta Garbo', around  
the Forbidden City in  
Beijing; 'The Hand';  
'The Fireman's Ball'

**C**inephilia always sounds to me like a medical condition. The kind of thing you might catch from overdosing on Mitchell Leisen movies – or perhaps from watching the whole of Mark Cousins's epic new television documentary *The Story of Film*. Running for 15 hours, covering more than a century of cinema and crisscrossing continents, this has been a highly personal, not to say obsessive undertaking. Cousins calls it an "odyssey", which is no doubt what it felt like over the years of its making, on a shoestring budget, commendably funded by Channel Four and the late UK Film Council. Now it's ready to appear on a range of screens: cinema-sized at the Toronto International Film Festival and in weekly one-hour segments on More4 from September.

As it happens, the very first audience to see part of *The Story of Film* on screen were cinema owners and programmers from 15 countries, gathered in Bologna for this year's Europa Cinemas workshop at the Cinema Ritrovato festival in June. The match seemed ideal. Our mission in this annual event is to help venues belonging to the network to reimagine the cinema experience as they face competition from new platforms and alleged lack of interest in 'old movies'. Cousins's ambition is to reignite enthusiasm for a global vision of cinema, building on his past ventures on television, at the Edinburgh Film Festival and most recently through the 8½ Foundation, launched with Tilda Swinton. Would he like to come and present some of *The Story of Film* to those urgently seeking inspiration, we asked? In the event, his hectic post-production schedule wouldn't allow a visit, but we had some DVD segments of the work in progress to screen before a Skype Q&A.

So we gathered early one morning to view what was dauntingly labelled "Hours 8 and 9". A sequence of cityscapes moves us eastward from present-day Paris and back to the Cold War era, before we plunge into Andrzej Wajda and Roman

# The Story of Film



**WEB OF ALLUSION**  
Mark Cousins compares overhead shots of drinks in (left, from top) 'Odd Man Out', 'Two or Three Things I Know About Her' and 'Taxi Driver'; right, 'Daisies'



Polanski offering two distinctive new voices from post-war Poland. Cousins starts with the scene in a ruined church in Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) where Zbigniew Cybulski quotes poetry to Ewa Krzyzewska; this Polish James Dean wears shades, Cousins observes in voiceover, "not because it's cool but because he's spent time in the sewers during the Warsaw uprising – a rebel with a cause". Then he cuts to the macho fisticuffs of Polanski's short *Two Men and a Wardrobe* (1957) and the edgy game-playing between husband and student hitchhiker in his debut feature *Knife in the Water* (1962). One film heavy with symbolism, including that inverted crucifix standing for a 'world upside down', the others apparently ideology-free and defiantly modernist.

Within minutes we're in Polanski's *Dance of the Vampires* (1967), described here as "one of his best films... a beautiful widescreen vision of Jewish middle Europe", and compared to a Chagall painting. Then it's on to Jirí Trnka's ominously surreal puppet film *The Hand* (1965), juxtaposed with the more genial satire of Milos Forman's *The Fireman's Ball* (1967).

An hour later, after a torrent of transitions that are often ingenious and sometimes provocative, we reluctantly left the odyssey just after the Indian filmmaker Mani Kaul had explained how Hindu philosophy influenced his film style. And when the sad news of Kaul's death arrived a month later, I'm sure many who were at that Bologna screening were reminded of his liveliness on screen.

There was no question that the segment had caught the imagination of these cinema professionals from three continents. We loved the kaleidoscopic choice of extracts and the pithy comments, distilled from the format of Cousins's interview-based *Scene by Scene* television series of the late 1990s. Above all we admired the enthusiasm for a truly international cinema, which is what most Europa Cinemas members try to present on their own screens; the evidence of filmmakers' radical experimentation during the 1960s – especially in the extracts from Vera

Chytilová's *Daisies* (1966) and Mikhail Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba* (1964) – also struck a chord. Surely, we felt for a utopian moment, this would awaken the curiosity of the generation for which *Star Wars* is already ancient history?

## Broad horizons

In many respects, Cousins's project could be seen as radically old-fashioned – a return to the synoptic narratives of cinema's first histories, from Terry Ramsaye's *Million and One Nights*, published as long ago as 1926, up to the last phase of the single-author, one-volume histories, with David Robinson's *World Cinema* (1973) and Eric Rhode's *A History of the Cinema* (1976). Next would come the era of the encyclopedias and textbooks, followed by the earliest web resources. It's also a return to something television once did superbly: the big history series, whether it was Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* (1969) or, in the case of cinema, Kevin Brownlow's *Hollywood* (1980).

The basic script is that of Cousins's 2004 book *The Story of Film*, which purported to be written for the kind of movie-struck youngster that he once was, intended to stimulate and broaden horizons in non-academic language. Although Cousins dutifully points his readers towards more scholarly texts, there is also a suggestion that perhaps 'film studies' has made its subject forbiddingly academic. Indeed one thrust of both book and film is to challenge the narrowing of focus that film studies effectively brought about. Taking Holly-

wood seriously has meant devoting a massive amount of attention to the minutiae of its output, distinguishing between its prodigious number of talented filmmakers. A consequence – although hardly one desired by the founders of film studies – has been to relegate much of the world's film production to a secondary role, or simply to ignore it. Compared with the appetite for discovery in the 1960s, when new filmmakers and even whole unknown national cinemas were eagerly embraced by those who later became the first official film academics, the film-studies agenda of today can seem meagre, and excessively focused on the US and Europe.

Cousins is an exuberant enthusiast for 'world cinema', not as a separate department reserved for non-Western countries (on the model of 'world music'), but as a guiding principle. Film has always been global, with its earliest products swiftly transported around the world to be shown far from their origins as a kind of visual Esperanto. Through film, we can still have contact with much more of the world than through any other medium; and Cousins wants to take us to as many places as possible in his odyssey – to make us see a world of diversity that is knitted together by the traffic of films. In his series, extracts from films are framed by environmental footage shot in cities and studios around the world, and interspersed with interviews with filmmakers and critics that all convey a sense of place as well as local identity.

I must confess that this is an approach that I find highly sympathetic. For all its ability to cross time and space, film also carries some imprint of its point of origin, whether in a natural setting or in a studio – what the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin called a "chronotope" in relation to literature – and it's this specificity that Cousins constantly seeks, and often succeeds in capturing. He visits graves – Eisenstein's and Dovzhenko's in Moscow, Ozu's near Tokyo – and meditates on what these figures bequeathed us. He looks at rooms and empty studios, and ponders on who worked there. Yes, *The Story of Film* is unashamedly

**He is an enthusiast for 'world cinema', not as a separate department but as a guiding principle**



## Cousins launches a convincing case for film as a developing literature of cross-reference and allusion

### HOUSE STYLES

A sight gag in 'Steamboat Bill, Jr', top left, is echoed in 'Deadpan'; below left; camera placement in 'Tokyo Story', top right, is echoed in 'Jeanne Dielman', below right

committed to 'great filmmakers' and to the art of film – which brings us to the newly controversial topic of cinephilia.

### The overlooked

What the word cinephilia has come to mean is not so much indiscriminate appetite for film, but a taste for the overlooked or ignored – a return to the enthusiastic archaeology and exploration that made film research an exciting new field before it entered the academy. Arguably it has never disappeared from view in France, where the current director of Cannes Festival, Thierry Frémaux, cheerfully admits to having 'caught the virus' as a youngster in the suburbs of Lyon. Leading exponents of this new cinephilia are the critics Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Danks. Another American critic, Dave Kehr, headlines his website "reports from the lost continent of cinephilia", and recently launched a new column in *Film Comment* with a dig at the "same few dozen figures" that film studies has been concerned with for 40 years. For Kehr, "Hollywood – as well as the French, British, Japanese, Italian, and countless other national cinemas – are infinitely richer than [supposed], and... a great deal of basic spadework remains to be done."

Cousins, I would guess, shares this outlook. But he faces the problem of making a documentary that has to work in the profoundly non-cinephile culture of TV. He has to cover the basics and produce a plausible 'story', which inevitably leads to simplifications and elisions that will make experts wince in places, even if his own montage skills can also produce striking successes. On the debit side, it's hard for someone who knows early cinema to resist pointing out that Cousins has entirely ignored the pioneering role of Robert Paul in British (and indeed world) film, giving credit instead to the Brighton filmmaker G.A. Smith and to the American Edwin S. Porter. And during an extended analysis of Porter's 1903 *Life of an American Fireman*, he doesn't even mention the film's 'original', James Williamson's Brighton-made *Fire!*

of two years earlier. Of course it's not possible to namecheck everyone, but it seems unfortunate that Cousins doesn't adequately reflect the sheer range of innovation that we now know marked British filmmaking's first ten years.

Against such omissions, however, there is an enormous amount to applaud and admire. Reproducing one of his book's opening gambits, Cousins juxtaposes three striking overhead shots of foaming drinks – a beer glass in Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* (1947), the coffee cup in Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1967) and De Niro contemplating a dissolving Alka-Seltzer in Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976). Noting that both the later filmmakers knew their shots' precursors, he is able to launch a convincing case for film as a developing literature of cross-reference and allusion. And as the film progresses, further comparisons across time and culture reinforce this claim. Buster Keaton's famous sight gag in *Steamboat Bill, Jr* (1928), when he is only saved by a precisely placed window opening as the side of a house falls on top of him, is deftly cross-referenced to Steve McQueen restaging the same perilous stunt in *Deadpan* (1997) and Elia Suleiman's sublime Keaton tributes in contemporary Palestine. Later, a beautifully crafted sequence on Yasujiro Ozu – boldly proclaimed by Cousins as "the greatest director ever" – is unexpectedly punctuated by a comparison shot from Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), showing her use of a similar level of camera placement.

Such unanticipated references work in two ways. Revelling in a range of allusions that refuse to stay within academic conventions reflects the cinephile culture of filmmakers since Godard. It also counteracts the slightly old-fashioned 'grammar of film' attitude evident in earlier sections, which seems to hark back to textbooks that took 1930s and 40s Hollywood editing as definitive. What Cousins's odyssey really points to is a much wider range of idiolects in world film. And yet, of course, Hollywood can't be ignored, although there are many signs that Cousins's atti-

tude is ambivalent. "Money," he declares near the beginning, "doesn't drive cinema – the money men don't know the secrets of the human heart."

Cousins has a number of strategies for dealing with the vastness of Hollywood. True to his odyssey ethic, he looks down on LA from the Hollywood sign, showing ironically how this can now be viewed in reverse shot from the shopping mall that includes a reconstruction of the long-vanished Babylonian elephants of D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916). Somewhat in the style of Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, he films a Christmas decoration in big close-up and compares Hollywood to a "bauble", which has seduced generations of those attracted to its resources. Film historian Cari Beauchamp recalls how central women were to Hollywood's early success, before they were relegated to being merely decorative. And Cousins argues – convincingly, I think – that what's come to be known as 'classical' Hollywood cinema should properly be considered 'romantic'. But the problem of Hollywood's hegemonic scale and commercialism – in spite of its fitful ability to nurture the innovation that is his central theme – remains essentially unsolved.

Having only seen half of *The Story of Film*, mostly in pre-final state, it's impossible for me to judge how successfully Cousins fulfils his vast ambition. But his odyssey may satisfy the desire for a unifying narrative that cinephile blog-culture can't quite provide. For those of us who remember cinephilia before it had a name, and the days of television taking cinema seriously, it certainly has a powerful, centrifugal appeal – and should at the very least encourage a new wave of exploratory DVD rental and downloading. It's already prompted a parallel 'world cinema' season on More4, and maybe it will contribute to the current boom in film societies and community cinemas delivering what multiplexes can't – the sense of adventure and discovery implicit in a world of film. Onward, Cousins, to that rosy-fingered dawn!

■ *'The Story of Film' is currently showing on More4*



# LIFE ON EARTH

In the extraordinary new Greek film *'Attenberg'*, a woman fascinated by David Attenborough's nature programmes confronts the mysteries of human behaviour. Director Athina Rachel Tsangari talks to **Jonathan Romney**



If you work for a long time as a film critic, you don't – if you're lucky – stop being impressed or even surprised. Provided you look in the right places, there's enough innovation and daring in current cinema to periodically reaffirm your faith in the art. What does tend to fade, however, is your capacity to be bewildered – to be taken unawares, left feeling incapable of explaining to yourself or others what a particular film is about or what it's doing. It's a feeling that still affects me when I watch certain films from the 1960s summer of cinematic modernism – films by Godard, Pasolini, Antonioni, Bergman.

Very occasionally, however, it comes as a bracing shock to find yourself genuinely stymied by a film. That has happened to me with *Attenberg*, the new film by the Greek director Athina Rachel Tsangari. The bewildered viewer gets some small help in situating *Attenberg*, in that in 2009 Tsangari was a producer on Yorgos Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* (a film which, given its international sales, is probably the

best economic break that Greece has had in recent years). There are clear affinities between the two films: both are shot by Thimios Bakatakis, and share a taut minimalist aesthetic and a tendency to *huis clos* (although *Attenberg* is starker visually); both tend playfully towards absurdist black comedy; both are big on gestuality and angular dance movement, and are fascinated with family structures, language, perversity, death and the modern Greek social landscape. They're also low-budget films made by a small, determinedly go-it-alone production company.

Other than that, I don't know quite how to pin down *Attenberg* – except to say that it's very much its own film, and anything but *Dogtooth* 2. I can tell you some of the things that it's about: a young woman coming to terms with adulthood, sexu-

#### ANIMAL KINGDOM

*'Attenberg'* intersperses the story of Marina (Ariane Labeled, on right in both pics) with ritualised scenes of dance and animal-like behaviour

ality and her father's mortality; the functions and limitations of language; the relationship between humanity and the animal kingdom. It's also a fan letter to Sir David Attenborough (the title is a wilful misspelling of his name), to the pioneering electro-punk duo Suicide – whose abrasive neopop resounds throughout – and even to *Monty Python*. But as for giving you a concise pitch, I can only refer you to Tsangari's Director's Statement, which reads, in its entirety: "I made a film about four people who happen to be in the same place for a short period of time. Three people who become four and then two. Three, of course, being the perfect number in any relation."

Here, nevertheless, is a synopsis of sorts. In a Greek coastal town dominated by an industrial plant, 23-year-old Marina (Ariane Labeled) lives with her father Spyros (Vangelis Mourikis), a bebop-loving architect undergoing treatment for cancer. Still a virgin, Marina is not merely inexperienced but, in a sense, sexually autistic; at the start of the film, her erotically confident friend Bella (Evangelia Randou) gives her a crash course in kissing, but Marina is unimpressed to the point of disgust. Like many things in a film dominated by a sense of alienation (a quintessentially 60s word), the act of kissing is made literal by being presented with sour detachment. "How does my tongue feel?" asks Bella as they jab said organs at each other with comic stiffness. "Like a slug," Marina replies. Marina later tackles the basic mechanics of sex, although she's prone to overdescribe the required actions – as if reciting a user's manual – when she gets together with a visiting engineer (*Dogtooth* director Lanthimos, who proves no more repressed in front of the camera than he was behind it).

*Attenberg*'s skeletal narrative is interspersed with highly ritualised scenes that partake variously of physical theatre, music video and dance *à la* Pina Bausch. In a series of interludes Marina and Bella, dressed in near-identical blue and black dresses, perform farcical dance duets – half-stately, half-gawky – marching side by side like Diane Arbus twins, then contorting their bodies into bizarre positions, at one point running splat into a wall in perfect synch. ("*Monty Python* was a great inspiration – the Ministry of Silly Walks," says Tsangari. "I just adore them. David Attenborough and *Monty Python* are different, but they're both kind of documentarians.") Marina and Bella also stroll at night past a tennis court lined with young people, and lip-synch to Françoise Hardy's 1962 hit 'Tous les garçons et les filles de mon âge', the adolescent lament of a girl excluded from her peers' game of love. Sublimely poised, this sequence comes across almost as a self-contained music video within the film.

In other scenes, the characters launch into duets of animal noises and gestures, mimicking gulls, gorillas and other creatures. Human dialogue breaks down into animal sounds – as if to suggest that beasts communicate better with each other than we ever could with words; language devolves into verbal torrents, like concrete poetry. In one scene Marina tells her father that she's uncomfortable at the thought of him having a man's body complete with testicles. This sparks an absurd volley of words: "Nutless – gutless – heartless – faithless – snotless – spotless – witless," as the subtitles have it (the original dialogue, as even a non-Greek speaker can hear, much more evidently plays on similar sounds).

◀ In that same scene, Marina worries over the idea of father and daughter imagining each other naked, and Spyros explains to her the social function of taboo. You could say that *Attenberg* – named after a man popularly thought of as a universal teacher of the human race – is a drama of pedagogy; it's about a woman who must consciously study the things that most people assimilate culturally. But the film makes no attempt to explain Marina's condition through conventional psychology or personal history. Marina's learning difficulties – figuratively speaking – are those of a perpetual innocent whose perspective constantly reveals the world's strangeness.

Another unifying thread is the film's distinctive visual quality. *Attenberg* favours static shots and long takes; it cultivates flatness and symmetry, isolating characters as if they were performing on a stage, or shooting them from the side, like figures in a frieze. (Would it be stretching it to see this as a subliminal nod to classical art and to stereotypical Greekness?) The film was shot in Aspra Spitia, a town in the Corinthian Gulf designed in the 1960s by the firm of architect and urban planner Constantinos A. Doxiadis. The intention was utopian – to make an organic, non-alienating habitat for the workforce of an aluminium plant – and there's certainly an imposing beauty to the way that DP Bakatakis shoots the town; in a repeated view from Marina's window, the rooftops spread out like a white plateau to the sea.

In close-up, however, the town is manifestly windblown and frayed, while the local plant, where Marina seems to work as a driver, is surely European cinema's bleakest industrial locale since Antonioni's 1964 *Red Desert* (and certainly a lot redder). As what you might call site-specific cinema, emerging from a particular locale, *Attenberg* is close kin to Lanthimos's first feature *Kinetta* (2005), also produced by Tsangari and shot by Bakatakis – a rather Ballardian drama about three characters using the titular resort as a theatrical stage for re-enacting murder scenes.

While at times *Attenberg* seems to make its intent clear in direct statements or quotations, at others – perplexingly – it explains nothing. The film uses several clips from the TV nature programmes of Sir David Attenborough, of whom Marina is an ardent fan (it's Bella who gets his name wrong). One is the much-loved sequence from *Life on Earth* (1979) in which the naturalist comes face to face with an inquisitive family of gorillas. His face radiating joy, in an awestruck but entirely unsentimental apprehension of the 'other', Attenborough makes the now-famous statement, "There is more meaning, and mutual understanding, in exchanging a glance with a gorilla, than any other animal I know."

Tsangari's suggestion, perhaps, is that we're a long way from achieving such revelations or intimations of closeness through communicating with each other – certainly if it's through the systems of human language and social or sexual ritual. These are more likely to be ways

## 'What happened to our generation was that lots of us went abroad, and found ways to make films'

of separating us, enforcing our estrangement.

The film's other explicit statement – one that I suspect comes closest to voicing the director's own views – comes in a monologue delivered by Spyros. (Indeed Tsangari told me when we met in London in October 2010, "If I were to identify with someone in *Attenberg*, it would probably be the father.") Spyros and Marina stand on a rooftop surveying the town that, in this fiction, he has helped create. "It is as if we were designing ruins," he says, "as if calculating their eventual collapse with mathematical precision. Bourgeois arrogance. Especially for a country that skipped the industrial age altogether. From shepherds to bulldozers, from bulldozers to mines and from mines directly to petit bourgeois hysteria. We built an industrial colony on top of sheep pens and thought we were making a revolution."

The town of Aspra Spitia was "an experiment that failed", Tsangari points out. "It was during that decade when Greece had a chance to become part of Europe – right after the civil war and before the junta, when we had this window of opportunity to dream westwards. And this town, like the rest of Greece, has deteriorated." Returning home after a long stay in the US, the director was aware of "a sense of walking in ruins". It's a condition specific to modern Greece, she says: "You see something and you know it's not really there to stay – it's being built to self-destruct, just because we don't have the right permanence of thought."

Tsangari is herself a sort of anti-Marina. Where her heroine has lived her life in one place, the

director is an inveterate globetrotter. Educated first in Thessaloniki, she went on to study in New York, then at the University of Texas in Austin, where she played a small role in Richard Linklater's *Slacker* (1991). Her own first feature was *The Slow Business of Going* (2000), an eccentric, sprawling meta-travelogue about a woman who travels the world with a rocking chair for something called the 'Global Nomad Project'. Dedicatees of this peripatetic oddity include errant cineastes Robert Frank, Chris Marker and Jim Jarmusch. Shot in nine cities including New York, Tangier and Moscow, it's an uneven work, overwhimsical and self-consciously hipsterish, but brimming with imaginative energy.

Tsangari returned to Greece to design the projections and videos for the opening and closing of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games – a somewhat more lavish, Cirque du Soleil-styled spectacle than you'd imagine from her films, as YouTube clips testify. "It's considered the 'bizarro' ceremony," she comments, "the opposite of a corporate ceremony."

Then came Haos Film, the company Tsangari founded with a group of collaborators. She's worked consistently with Yorgos Lanthimos – most recently producing his new film *Alps* – but although the two directors' work has given Greek cinema a new presence on the world scene, they aren't part of a movement, she insists. "I hope not. We're way too undisciplined to form a movement." Still, she admits there's a new informality in Greek film production, which Haos appears to have spearheaded.

"What happened to our generation – and the generation after us, the 25-year-olds – was that lots of us went abroad, went to film school, and found more flexible ways to make films. We decided to make *Kinetta* alone, without state support, and we were considered crazy because a filmmaker was producing another filmmaker's film, instead of a proper producer. And then it was the only film that went around the festivals that year [2005/6] representing Greece – all the big films that had funding were nowhere.

"It's an unapologetic way of working any way we can, when we believe in each other's films," she continues. "And it's a way that's being embraced by other filmmakers – so films are produced faster. They're much more observant in terms of what's going on around, and they're not safe."

When it came to making *Attenberg*, Tsangari insists that she wasn't out to alienate or perplex. "Maybe the film is difficult to get because of my decision to keep breaking the narrative. I'm not doing it to be provocative or avant-garde – it's something intuitive to me. There's not a design behind it. There are fragments that come together in the shoot, and then I break it apart again in the editing. When you're making a film, you're blind – you have to be. You get into this state of disconnection from your sense and from your senses."

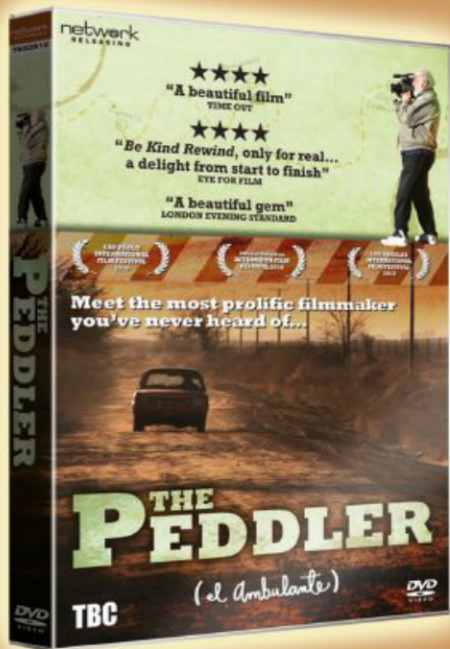
In fact at the time of our meeting Tsangari still seems close enough to the film to be moderately perplexed by it herself, and unsure how people will react. "Seriously," she asks me, leaning in confidentially, "do you secretly think it's a mess?"

■ *'Attenberg'* is released on 2 September, and is reviewed on page 54

### RENAISSANCE WOMAN

As well as writing and directing *'Attenberg'*, Athina Rachel Tsangari has produced films by Yorgos Lanthimos and acted for Richard Linklater





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FILM FESTIVAL  
2010

LOS ANGELES  
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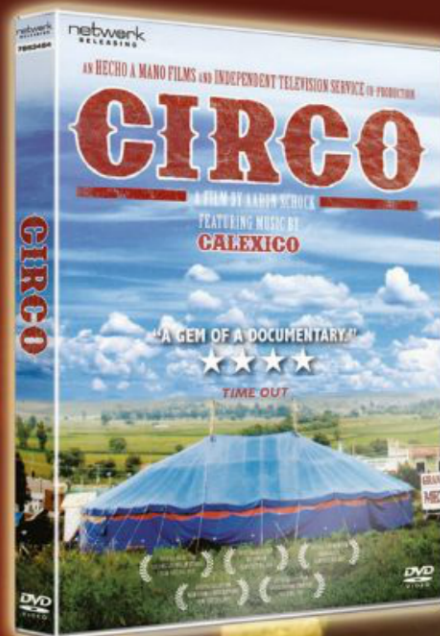


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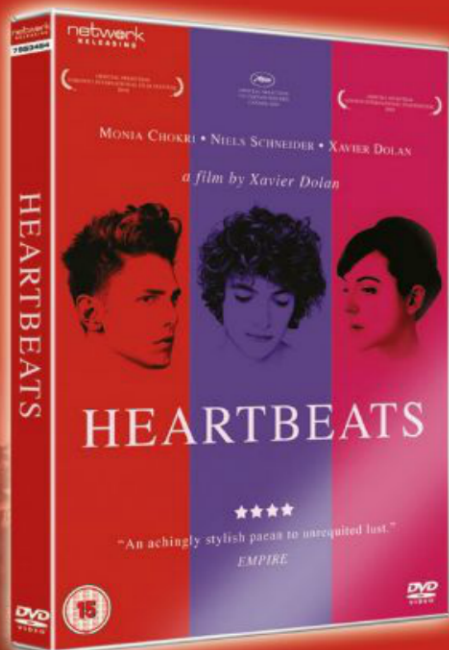
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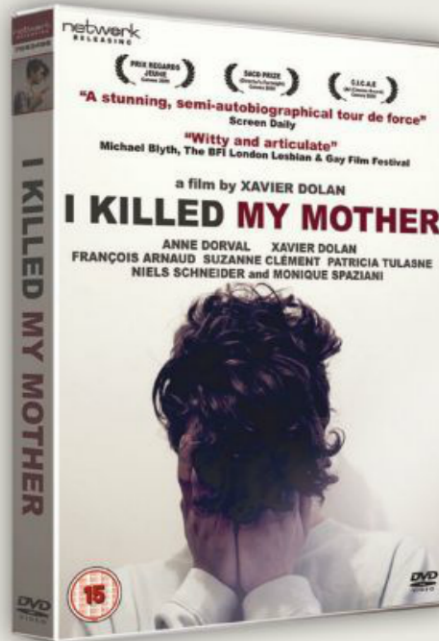
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**"Witty and articulate"**

*Michael Blyth,  
The BFI London Lesbian & Gay  
Film Festival*

A director with an 'outsider's eye' is unleashed on a British literary classic: it's a familiar strategy, but it pays dividends with Cary Joji Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre*, says **Claire Monk**

# EYRE CONDITIONING

**T**his is what a 21st-century big-screen adaptation of one of the most widely known and studied (and adapted) 19th-century novels in the English literary canon looks like at a moment when a globalised entertainment industry meets a *zeitgeist* of austerity and uncertainty – and, perhaps against expectation, the new *Jane Eyre* shows that this most familiar of romantic texts and 'culturally British' genres can still refresh and surprise, as well as move.

Adopting a flashback structure that reverts to the linearity of Jane's subjective story only in the closing quarter of its two-hour running time, the film's opening image presents the adult Jane, close-framed in rear silhouette against natural light, poised to flee Thornfield Hall; then as a tiny, distant figure at the crossroads of two tracks across a rocky High Peaks landscape, filmed aerially – and with extraordinary beauty – on 35mm. While the film's British producer (Alison Owen) and screenwriter (Moira Buffini) pitch *Jane Eyre* as a woman's picture with "spooky" as well as "intensely romantic" credentials, its California-born director (Cary Joji Fukunaga) cites 21st-century photographers and the rural US landscapes of Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978) as visual references. His talented Brazilian DP (Adriano Goldman), meanwhile, utters a sentiment one suspects is rarely heard in UK period-production circles – "The prospect of shooting a period film in England was so intriguing that it was enough for me to commit" – and adheres to the dictum of Malick's cinematographer Néstor Almendros that "period movies should have less light".

Australian-born and ballet-trained, *Jane Eyre*'s 21-year-old rising star Mia Wasikowska (Alice in Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*, daughter to lesbian mums in Lisa Cholodenko's *The Kids Are All Right*) imbues the teen-adult Jane Eyre with a compelling directness that credibly fuses the raw-faced (and, in this version, absolutely unbending) virtue and otherworldliness that so "transfix" the story's older, jaded, Byronic love interest Edward Fairfax Rochester (played here by the German-Irish Michael Fassbender). The child actors, too, are outstandingly well cast, notably Amelia Clarkson as a fearlessly feisty, outspoken and (when self-defence demands) pugilistic young Jane.

To be sure, some of the aristocratic attractions that so offended opponents of the 'heritage film' back in the 1990s (the country houses – the "theme park of the past" that the Scottish literary critic Cairns Craig complained of in *Sight & Sound* 20 years ago) are still nominally in place, as is the genre's characteristic attention to fine visual and material detail. A slideshow feature on "The Real Places of Jane Eyre's World" on the film's official



**ESCAPING THE COUNTRY HOUSE**  
Mia Wasikowska, both pics, as Jane Eyre and Michael Fassbender, left, as Mr Rochester in Cary Joji Fukunaga's take on 'Jane Eyre'

website dutifully showcases the aristocratic histories of the film's ancient country-house and hall locations, alongside the stark beauty of the Derbyshire Peak District locations. *Jane Eyre*'s production notes are keen, as usual, to stress the structural complexity, painstaking hand-crafting and formidable weight of the outer- and undergarments Wasikowska had to contend with in freezing temperatures and driving rain.

But the film's conformities to jaded expectations end here. Indeed its cardinal virtue is a straightforward sincerity and uncynicism that perhaps only a youthful, cultural-outsider director – reportedly all but impervious to earlier *Jane Eyre* adaptations – could have brought to the project. (IMDb lists 11 earlier feature or short-film versions and ten TV dramatisations, not to mention off-genre spin-offs such as Jacques Tourneur's 1943 *I Walked with a Zombie* or the two adaptations of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys's 1966 postcolonial reworking of *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Bertha Mason, the "intemperate and unchaste" Jamaican Creole first wife whom Rochester conceals as the archetypal 'madwoman in the attic'.)

## Cultural perspective

Now 34, Cary Joji Fukunaga is a well-travelled, multilingual Californian of Japanese and Swedish parentage, whose 2009 debut feature *Sin Nombre* scooped Best Direction and Best Cinematography awards at that year's Sundance Film Festival – the latter going to Adriano Goldman, retained as DP on

**Its cardinal virtue is a sincerity that only a youthful, cultural-outsider director could have brought to it**

*Jane Eyre*. Widely praised at festivals, *Sin Nombre* staged a bleak, violent but unusually complex encounter between Honduran freight-train stowaways – centrally, a teenage-girl protagonist – attempting to enter the United States illegally, and the Mexican youth gang who rob their train.

There's nothing new to the strategy of hiring directors fresh from hard-hitting projects, or putatively offering a fresh cultural perspective, to refresh or retool the contemporary British historical, heritage and costume film. (See, for instance, British director Saul Dibb's graduation from 2004's black urban drama *Bullet Boy* to 2008's aristocratic biopic *The Duchess*.) Indeed producer Alison Owen is an old hand at such strategies, having hired Shekhar Kapur to direct *Elizabeth* (1998), a film whose boldly stylised, horror-inflected take on the *realpolitik* and religious divisions of Tudor England single-handedly inspired some commentators to declare 'the end of English heritage'.

By contrast with that film, however, the appeal and novelty of Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre* lie in a quietness of style and mood that feels suited to austere times – and could not be further removed from the self-conscious, in-your-face interventions in the heritage genre that characterised the Blairite 'cool Britannia' of the 1990s. (Alongside *Elizabeth*, we could equally cite the Canadian writer-director Patricia Rozema's 1999 *Mansfield Park*, a lively and intelligent postcolonial reworking of Jane Austen's novel that made explicit both the polymorphous erotic charges between its characters and the relation between English country-house wealth and slavery.)

Fukunaga's film can thus be viewed as an intriguing – if not unflawed – index of how strategies for renewing the appeal of 'timeless' classics and historical narratives appear to have shifted in a more muted direction over the past decade. It's also an object lesson in what it means, today, to make a transnational film of an English literary classic for an expressly global audience.

The film's storytelling and core performances are distinguished above all by a cold-wind-on-the-face plainness and directness. This simplicity is made possible by Fukunaga's mastery of classical technique (as already noted by the veteran US critic Roger Ebert in his review of *Sin Nombre*, which he declared "an extraordinary debut" and "riveting from start to finish"). You could call *Jane Eyre* 'neo-classical realist': an effect reinforced by Michael O'Connor's pared-down costuming; the chilly natural light, slate-and-earth colour palette and precise compositions of Goldman's exquisite cinematography; and – more unusually – a script (by playwright and *Tamara Drewe* screenwriter Moira Buffini) and performances that take an unmannered pleasure in the archaisms of period language, intonation and dialect. In its



archaic naturalism, this approach arguably has more in common with Michael Haneke's 2009 *The White Ribbon* than with recent British trends in classic adaptation – both on television and in big-screen examples such as Joe Wright's 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* – towards the modernisation and casualisation of period speech and the sexing-up of period relationships (both present and correct in this film's most recent precursor, the BBC's 2006 *Jane Eyre*, starring Ruth Wilson).

This archaism of language and dialect – sometimes elaborate, sometimes stilted (as the characters struggle with taboo emotions), often referencing the spiritual and supernatural – serves the goal of period verisimilitude, while also suiting the classical plainness of Fukunaga's aesthetic preferences and contributing to a distancing sense of 'the past as a foreign country' (something that some participants in my own study of period-film audiences actively craved). While this language also provides a vestigial vessel for Buffini's proposed emphasis on *Jane Eyre's* more gothic elements, the finished film in truth owes more to the spirit of post-Enlightenment Romanticism, both as aesthetic and emotional experience and in its deeper ethos.

The film's widescreen aesthetic, closely framed protagonists and intimate use of natural sound (alongside Dario Marianelli's classical orchestral score) might feel strikingly contemporary, but they are also driven by Romantic imperatives – the spiritual interplay between the human figure and engulfing epic landscapes; the at once physically immediate and powerfully interior selfhood of Wasikowska's "poor, obscure" yet uncannily self-possessed heroine. Its egalitarian and proto-feminist themes of equality and autonomy, personal and moral integrity and trust, feel resonant and relevant to our unequal, disillusioned and troubled times – yet also strangely timeless.

Jane's *Bildungsroman* journey of growth, both interior and social – from sorely constrained horizons ("I wish a woman could have action in her life, like a man... I've never seen a city, I've never spoken with men and I fear my whole life will pass") to a position where she can address the upper-class, male and significantly older Rochester "equal as we are" – takes her through a series of ambiguous, liminal positions within the Victorian social hierarchy: from rejected orphan ward of a 'respectable' but unloving aunt, to governess (or in Jane's words, "paid subordinate") in Rochester's more welcoming household, then "a home and work, free and honest" as a village schoolteacher, and finally as the unexpected inheritor of a fortune. This uncertainty of status provokes comment or anxiety from others and, for Jane, an ongoing existential quest to assert her true selfhood against these misperceptions – a true self that finds its match in her "communion of spirits" with Rochester.

Yet Fukunaga's powerful telling of this journey casts a mythic, timeless spell that – in transcending the severe 19th-century gender and class constraints at the heart of Brontë's novel – raises ambiguities around the film's status as a 'historical' representation. The film abounds in references to spirit worlds and the supernatural. On Jane's first formal introduction to Rochester, he accuses her of having "bewitched" his horse while waiting for "your people... the imps and elves and little green men". From one perspective, this emphasis relates authentically to Victorian beliefs and the Christian debates directly aired in Brontë's novel (as when the child Jane is comforted by her friend Helen Burns with assurances of an invisible "kingdom of spirits commissioned to guard yer").

But for global audiences raised on *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*, such generically familiar talk of the fantastical (coupled with *Jane Eyre's* not-

unfamiliar iconography of infinite landscapes, ancient halls and ruined castles) may conjure an immersive, mythic and timeless narrative world more readily than a specific, socially grounded historical past. Fully in keeping with this, the example of Jane's artwork shown to prompt Rochester's observation that "your drawings are, for a schoolgirl, peculiar" – a picture of "the North Star" depicting a bearded, robed pagan Norse god against an indigo sky – would not look out of place on a 21st-century fan-art website such as deviantArt; while Jane's reply – "I imagine things I am powerless to execute" – will resonate widely in these same fan communities.

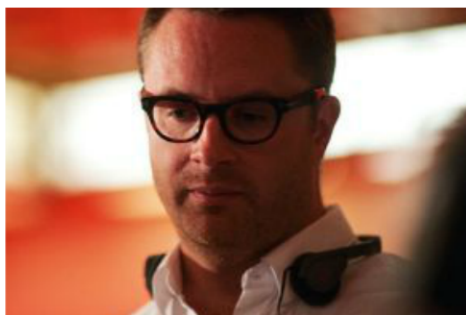
The narration's close alignment with Jane's morally unsullied point of view similarly proves a double-edged sword, permitting the same intense, even solipsistic identification experienced by many fans of *Jane Eyre* the novel, but ensuring that any darker elements beyond Jane's experience remain, on the whole, confined to dialogue. With one jarring exception (Bertha's offscreen attack on her brother Richard Mason leaves a startlingly graphic wound) Fukunaga adopts a 'tell but don't show' rectitude that leaves certain key points under-elucidated. Audiences must take it on trust that Michael Fassbender's Rochester is as dissolute as he claims; the precise nature of Bertha's violent mental malaise and the colonial Caribbean context in which her marriage to Rochester was brokered by his father are also assumed to be of no interest to its audiences.

Despite such lacunae, Cary Joji Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre* remains a striking cinematic achievement from a director of exceptional talent – and a film whose reception in the UK will be of considerable interest.

■ *'Jane Eyre'* is released in the UK on 9 September, and is reviewed on page 68

Best known for his Copenhagen-set 'Pusher' trilogy, Danish director Nicolas Winding Refn brings a European style and sensibility to his first American film, the gripping crime-and-cars thriller 'Drive'. He talks to **Nick Roddick**

# STEALER'S WHEELS



**THE OUTSIDER**  
Like the previous Danish films of director Nicolas Winding Refn, above, his first American movie 'Drive', top and opposite, focuses on a full-time outsider – Ryan Gosling's unnamed getaway driver

**N**icolas Winding Refn's films are set in a world where violence, drunkenness, drug addiction and racism are the norm – but especially violence. His characters are eternal outsiders and, on the rare occasion when normal life does put in an appearance, it doesn't hang around for long. The balloons and cakes of the birthday party in *Pusher III* (2005) provide only the briefest of respites from the violence. There is nonetheless a set of values that underlies all his films, both aesthetic and philosophical. But the nearest we get to a message is when Mads Mikkelsen's cellmate warns him, at the start of *Pusher II* (2004), that he needs to make something clear to the world: "If you fuck with me, I'll fuck you right back."

Refn's world, although usually filmed on the real streets of real cities, is not realistic, any more than Leone's West was. ("Leone," he says admiringly, "understood that film was not reality.") And his characters are heightened, sometimes almost mythic loners. Until now, though, Refn has relied mainly on his native Copenhagen – the setting of the *Pusher* trilogy and the even more compelling *Bleeder* (1999) – to help him hit his stride. His last two films *Valhalla Rising* (2009) and *Bronson* (2008), set respectively in medieval Scotland and a series of British jails, appear sometimes to lie outside his comfort zone.

Well, that comfort zone just expanded: his latest film *Drive* is set in Los Angeles and proves to be one of the tensest, most stylish and most perfectly realised crime thrillers since *Point Blank* (1967). Awarded the Best Director prize at Cannes, it looks set to boost Refn into the major league, not least because it would be equally at home in a multiplex or an arthouse. It is, quite simply, a great movie, whichever way you slice it. As usual, the central character is a full-time outsider: known only as Driver (Ryan Gosling), he is a stuntman by day, getaway driver by night. Again, the lid stays on the violence until a turning point comes and the mayhem begins.

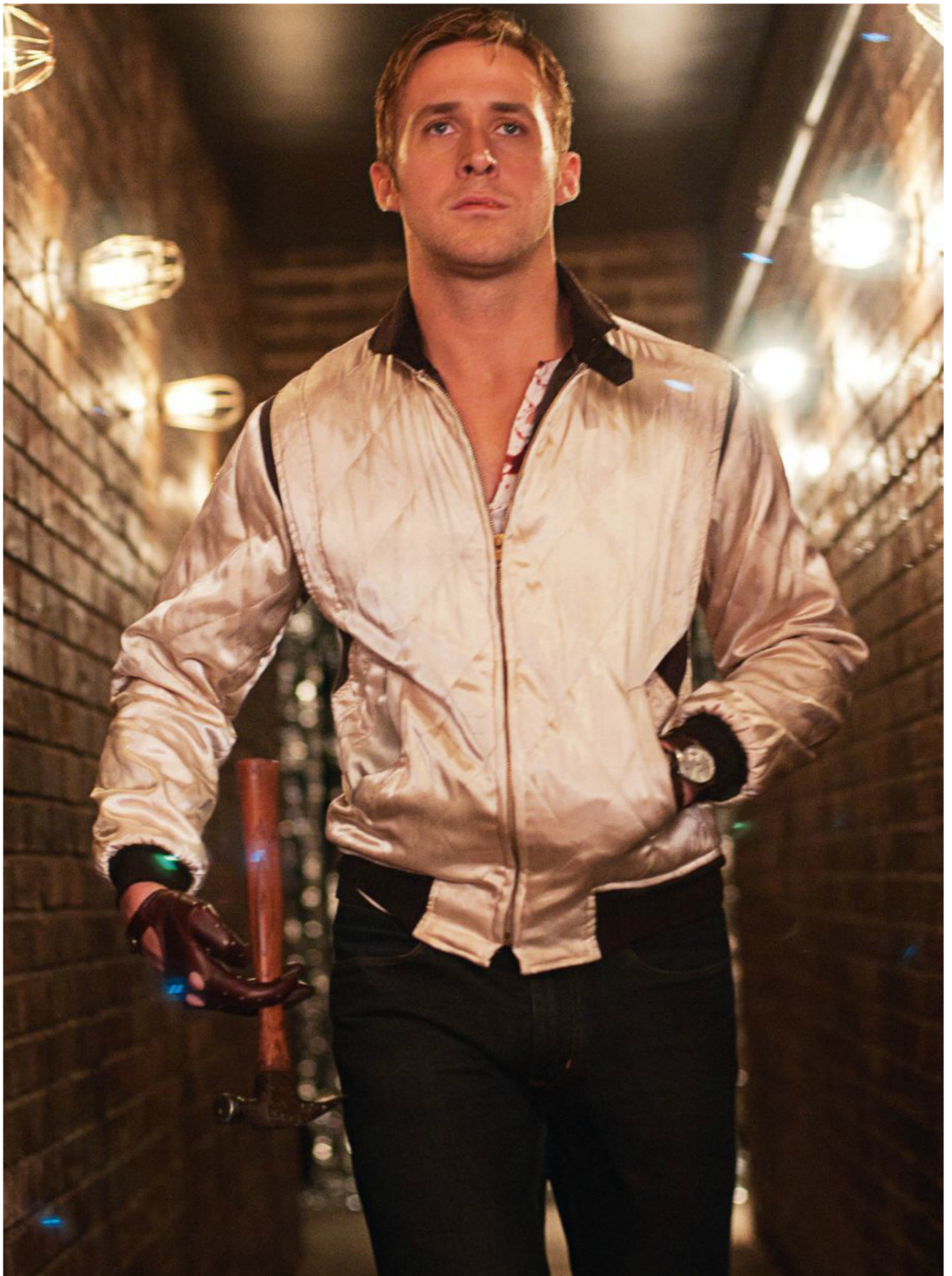
Honed over half a dozen films, Refn's style – built on fast tracking shots through the streets, often at ankle-level – morphs here into some deliriously beautiful static set-ups, the most memorable of which frames Gosling and Carey Mulligan (as his otherwise-engaged love interest Irene) in a hallway, a window open onto the night-time LA skyline to his left (as we look at it), a doorway in sharp primary colours behind her. Clearly, with so much movement happening in the driving scenes, some balance was needed. What's impressive is the way Refn has reformulated his aesthetic, not just for a new city, but for a new sort of story – one in which redemption can briefly be glimpsed – and even a new genre. The result is a truly remarkable film, as artistically impressive as it is viscerally entertaining.

**Nick Roddick:** From what I hear, 'Drive' reached you with a script, producers and a star already attached. Is that how it happened?

**Nicolas Winding Refn:** Now that the film is a success, everyone's saying they were the ones that came to me. But actually it was very simple: it was Ryan Gosling. After *Valhalla Rising* I was like, "Where can I put myself in the most difficult situation to make a movie? Where would they try to control me the most?" It was like some kind of personal game. So I was in LA with a very good script called *The Dying of the Light* which was originally going to be with Robert De Niro. That didn't work out for some reason and they asked me who I would like to play the lead. I said, "There's only one person: Harrison Ford." Miraculously, Harrison Ford said yes. And then, in classic Hollywood terms, everything just went kind of sour. Which is when I got a call from Ryan Gosling.

**NR:** Did you know him?

**NWR:** Nope, I'd never met him. His agent put him in touch with my management. That's what you do in Hollywood: you take meetings. They can be with development executives, but you know that's not going to lead to anything! You can meet with the studio head, which is a bigger chance. But with a star you can get films made.



◀ The script they sent me was very good, but it was meant to be a \$60 million Universal franchise movie: Hugh Jackman, real man, leather jacket, sexy Latino woman, you know – which I wasn't into at all. But the script was like a page-turner. So I said to Ryan, "Sure, let's meet up."

I had gotten flu on the plane, so I took these US anti-fever drugs which you put in hot water and drink and it was like smoking morphine – I was so out of it. I was speaking very slowly with long pauses and I'm sure Ryan thought, "This is not what I thought it was going to be like." Halfway through dinner, I asked him if he could take me home. He was like, "You want me to drive you home? Well... OK." He's a very nice man.

So we were sitting in the car and, because of the silence that's so awkward when you don't really know each other, Ryan turns on the radio and REO Speedwagon kicks in. You know when you're ill, you're very emotional? And I get very easily affected by things anyway. [It was] a song of my youth so I started singing – I've never done that in front of anybody – and banging my hands and feet and just getting into it. And Ryan's like, "How did I get this guy in my car?" Then I turned to him and I said, "I've got it. I know what *Drive* is. It's about a man who drives around at night listening to music." And that is how this movie got made.

I read the book, which is only 100 pages long, but it was awesome and I was like, "This is it! We make the book. Let's not make a \$60 million movie about cars." So I met with [screenwriter] Hossein [Amini] in London; we clicked; he came to LA. We sat down and it was like a breath of fresh air for him as well. His structure was really good – he'd really extracted a structure for the movie that wasn't there in the book.

**NR: There's always a moment in your films where the violence suddenly bursts out – after which there's no turning back.**

**NWR:** Some years ago, I started reading Grimms' fairytales to my daughter and I remember thinking, "It would be great to make a movie like a Grimm's fairytale." It has archetypal characters, it's very short, very confined, and very much about preserving innocence and purity against evil.

I said to Hoss, "Let's make it like a fairytale." The *Driver* is a knight who roams the countryside – he even has a silver jacket like a suit of armour! He lives as one person by night and another by day, a bit like a superhero in the making. But he's psychotic. He's not psychopathic, because he has a lot of empathy and he protects purity. But he is psychotic because, when it comes to violence, he has no limitations. And that's how the fairytales always end up: the wicked are always punished in the most violent and extreme ways. With *Drive* it was very much, "How can I make a John Hughes movie for about 40 minutes and then switch everything around once the *Driver* realises what he has to do?" It's like a cut. It's not like a character gradually changing. It's a cut.

**NR: You talk about preserving innocence and purity. Do you think it's possible to talk about purity and violence in the same breath?**

**NWR:** Yeah it is, because art is essentially an act of violence. There's a very similar structure between war and art. They're both very powerful – and they can both be used to obtain or gain



**KNIGHT ERRANT**  
In between jobs as a getaway driver and a stuntman, the *Driver* (Ryan Gosling) snatches a brief quiet moment with Irene (Carey Mulligan)

## 'I said, "Let's make it like a fairytale." The *Driver* is a knight – he even has a silver jacket like a suit of armour'

or invade cultures. The difference between them is that, where war destroys, art inspires. The *Driver* is essentially a person who doesn't know how to deal with the real world. Once it becomes real, his dogmatic approach to things gets difficult and he makes mistakes by believing that this is the best way to protect. He's a man of violence – but of course it ends up the wrong way and he has to rethink...

**NR: This guy has no other life, no backstory. Is that a European reaction to America – a sort of mythic view?**

**NWR:** Very European. What's interesting about the situation with *Drive* is that here was a movie that a star had wanted to make: the exact same situation with Lee Marvin on *Point Blank* and Steve McQueen on *Bullitt* [1968]. McQueen had wanted [director] Peter Yates to come from England. And even more similar to my situation is that Marvin would only do *Point Blank* with John Boorman. And not just that: he wanted John Boorman to do it his way and protected him to make the film the way it ended up. It was the same here on *Drive* with Ryan.

**NR: So part of the Hollywood game was seeing how you would function under a new set of circumstances?**

**NWR:** Going to Hollywood to make *The Dying of the Light* was more like an ego situation. You know, "Can I do it? Can I not do it?" In hindsight, thank God it didn't happen, because I would have been miserable. With *Drive*, everything just felt right. And Ryan was there to protect me.

**NR: At what stage did it stop being a \$60 million Universal project?**

**NWR:** All the studios passed on it. Nobody would buy into it. So in hindsight that was a good thing because it meant we had to go out and get independent financing, which is where I come from. I know the limitations of money and independent films: you get this and that and you make the fucking movie.

**NR: Do you like working that way?**

**NWR:** I like working that way for now, because it's how I can sustain my control. Of course I would love to try and do a film where the studio says, "Here's the cheque: make whatever you want!" But with *Drive*, what I thought was going to be the

battle between European film and American film turned out to be a first-class, super-duper, positive experience. I loved it. I can't tell you a bad thing. Even when people were like, "This is what you made? This is what we paid for?"

**NR: Really?**

**NWR:** Some people were really nervous, because nobody thought it was going to work. There was even a person very high up in the system who said to me, "Your movie will never work with an audience. The critics are going to hate it. Recut it, redesign it, rescore it – everything." And I wouldn't.

**NR: How do you set up shots. Do you storyboard?**

**NWR:** No.

**NR: But you seem to know exactly what you want. Does that come from looking through a viewfinder or from reacting to a location?**

**NWR:** It comes first from the location and then it becomes "What would the actors like to do?" I never frame first, because there's a big difference between stylistic and stylised. Stylised is the idea before the emotion; stylistic is the emotion before the idea. So if it feels right, it will look right. You always move with the actor and, once you feel that the actor is comfortable in his movement, then you frame.

**NR: I hear you may be doing a remake of 'Logan's Run' (1976). Is that just a rumour or is it a real possibility?**

**NWR:** It's real. *Logan's Run* is the classic, original disco sci-fi...

Ryan and I have very similar sensibilities. We're very different in our background, but we connect very strongly emotionally. I love him: I really sincerely enjoy his presence and his collaboration... So I said to him, "We're in Hollywood, why don't we go all the way? We had a blind date, we had great mental sex, we got this movie. Now let's do a studio film." And then that night I got a call asking if I was interested in *Logan's Run*. I said, "Yes, yes, yes, yes," – because I've been obsessed with the movie since I was little. Then Warners said yes too! But let's see what happens.

■ "Drive" is released on 23 September, and is reviewed on page 60

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A bloody revolution in Chile.  
He had to deal with the bodies.  
He chose the wrong time to fall in love.

# POST MORTEM

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A Film by Pablo Larraín

STORY BY ALFREDO CASTRILLO, ANTONIA TEGERS, JAVIER VASQUEZ, ANDRÉS VILLALBA, MARCELO ALONSO, MARCEL TABLA, SANTIAGO GARRAJO, FREDERICO MANSUR, ALDO PARRON  
SCREENPLAY BY SERGIO ARMSTRONG AND DIRECTOR PABLO LARRAÍN. BASED ON THE BOOK BY ANTONIA TEGERS AND MARCELO ALONSO. DIRECTED BY PABLO LARRAÍN  
CAST: ALFREDO CASTRILLO, ANTONIA TEGERS, JAVIER VASQUEZ, ANDRÉS VILLALBA, MARCELO ALONSO, MARCEL TABLA, SANTIAGO GARRAJO, FREDERICO MANSUR, ALDO PARRON  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: MARCELO ALONSO, ANDRÉS VILLALBA, ANDRÉS GARRASCO. PRODUCED BY JUAN DE DIOS LARRAÍN. DIRECTED BY PABLO LARRAÍN

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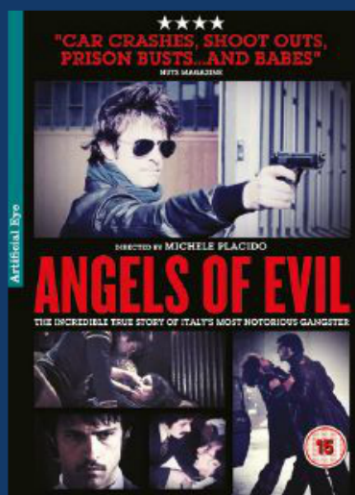
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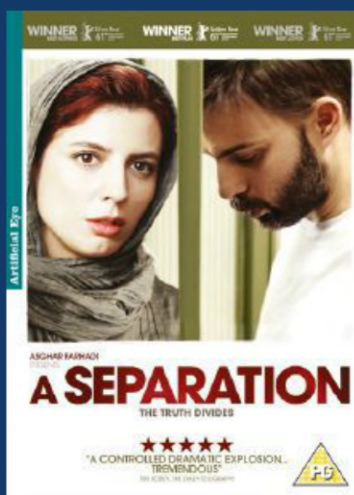
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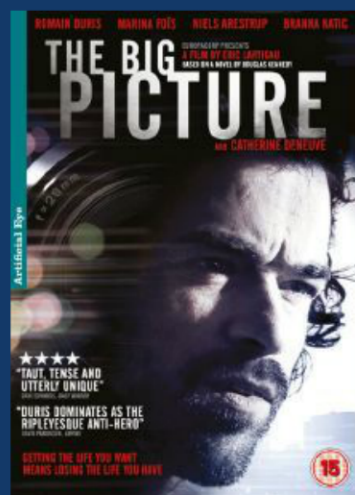
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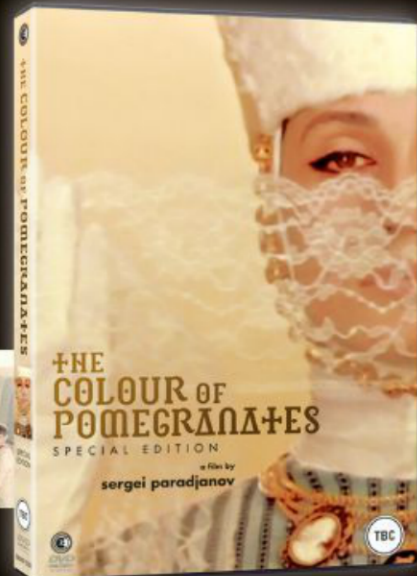
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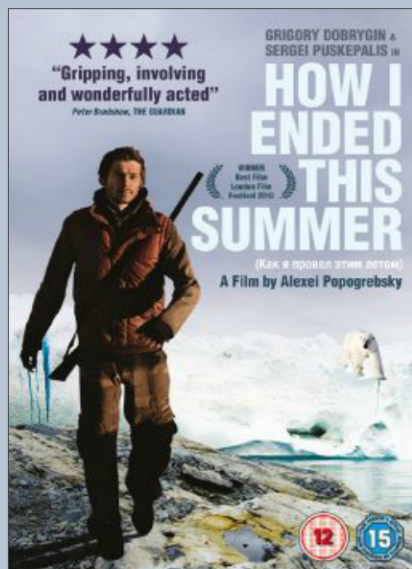
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from Morris-dancing sceptic to admirer **p81**  
.....

# Ghost in the machine

A neurotic Chilean mortuary assistant in the year of Pinochet's coup is the focus of *'Post Mortem'*, a character study that's every bit as distinctive and chilling as Pablo Larraín's last film *'Tony Manero'*. By **Jonathan Romney**

## Post Mortem

Pablo Larraín, 2010

At the end of M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense*, we discovered together with Bruce Willis's supposedly living character that he had really been dead all along. It sometimes happens in non-genre films too that we sense we are watching characters who, although ostensibly operating as living beings in real environments, are to all intents and purposes dead already – figuratively, that is, rather than in a supernatural sense. This is the case with many films by certain directors – Béla Tarr, Lisandro Alonso, Raúl Ruiz, Jim Jarmusch come to mind – whose characters often seem akin to phantoms reenacting actions they might have performed when alive.

Detecting such wraiths in the skin of supposedly living characters is often purely a matter of the viewer's perception, but the effect presents itself in a more heightened form in the case of Mario Cornejo (Alfredo Castro), the anti-hero of Pablo Larraín's *Post Mortem*. The title gives the game away, suggesting that Mario not only literally assists in autopsies, but that he himself is somehow eking out a post-death existence on earth. The implication too is that Chile – in 1973, the year of the Pinochet coup – is already in a post-mortem state: a country of ghosts, with the murderous military regime seemingly intent on turning the nation into a republic of the dead.

*Post Mortem* is a follow-up to Larraín's extraordinary second film *Tony Manero* (2008), about one man's pathological state of denial during the Pinochet regime. The new film takes *Tony Manero's* sardonically macabre humour even further. On one level, *Post Mortem* can be read as a realistic drama about an ordinary man – albeit a highly disturbed one – who goes about his daily business before being caught up in the traumatic events of September 1973. But several things militate against the film being read too literally. One is a disconcerting scene out of sequence – an apparent flash-



**Once the military is in power, the coroners' job is no longer to investigate the causes of death, simply to record and count the bullet holes**

forward in which Mario's neighbour and sometime lover Nancy (Antonia Zegers) appears inexplicably as a corpse under examination. Another factor is the treatment of the relationship between Nancy and Mario, whose glaring eccentricity is distinctly at odds with conventional psychological drama. Nancy is self-regarding, flamboyantly neurotic – and seemingly a perfect mate for Mario; when she inexplicably starts crying in an extraordinary extended scene, Mario suddenly, hysterically starts weeping too, tears and snot dripping off his face. Mario is played by Alfredo Castro, who was so peerlessly creepy in *Tony Manero* as the sociopathic disco king Raúl; and if anything, he's stranger still here, thin to the

point of resembling a newly exhumed corpse or a morbidly floppy marionette, with lank hair falling over his usually expressionless face.

Then there is the film's stylisation; it may be in part a brilliant response to budget limitations, but it works to extraordinary effect, the action seeming to take place in an uncannily still dream world. The explosive drama of the coup d'état figures as a conspicuous absence, prefigured in the opening image, shot from beneath the undercarriage of a military vehicle passing over an empty street littered with debris. The coup's eruption is heard off screen, missed by Mario, who happens to be taking a shower as it happens. We hear planes passing overhead, glass smashing, the noise of crowds – and then silence, as Mario steps out into a deserted street.

But the city of Santiago seems just as ghostly before the coup as it does after. From the start of the film, Mario's world echoes with hollow, distant sounds as if we're in an aquarium (the buzz of electric lights, a phantom cancan echoing in the corridors of the variety theatre), while Sergio Armstrong's photography (in 16mm, blown up

to 35mm) is a nauseous palette of pale greens, browns, purples and pinks that evoke the discolouration of a cadaver. The widescreen framing is unsettlingly eccentric too, suggesting bodies trapped in frames, windows and boxes, or on stage-like performance spaces.

The film falls into two distinct chapters. One depicts the relationship between two lonely and disturbed people – the man an ineffectual, solitary masturbator and the woman a deranged narcissist – who share only their desperation and their intense denial of what's going on around them. Driving in his car, Mario and Nancy are in a hurry to get away from the political reality of the socialist demonstration they've wandered into (manifestly a communing of the already dead, or at least the marked-for-death). Nancy later lets out a *cri de coeur* of blind denial after her house has been destroyed, and her younger brother and union-activist father have disappeared: "We don't have anything to do with this. We're peaceful people. Call the police."

The second chapter, recounting the coup's aftermath, is more overtly nightmarish. In a distressing scenario – clearly drawn from reality, but echoing the visual metaphors of absurdist theatre – corpses pile up in corridors and on stairwells, like so much backlogged material to be processed by the bureaucracy of death, of which Mario is now a part. Once the military is in power, the coroners' job is no longer to investigate the causes of death, simply to record and quantify – literally, to count the bullet holes.

Larraín seems to offer two overt elements of political commentary. One is the sequence in which, with massed top brass in attendance, Mario's boss Dr Castillo performs an autopsy on a mutilated corpse, which we learn is that of Salvador Allende; Castillo concludes that the deposed president could have shot himself – the suggestion being that the coroner is colluding in the official cover-up of his presumed assassination. (Though in fact a new autopsy performed this July confirmed that Allende did indeed take his own life.) Another key





#### THE WALKING DEAD

In 'Post Mortem', Mario (Alfredo Castro, all pics) is a mortuary assistant in 1973 Chile whose life becomes entangled with that of his neighbour Nancy (Antonia Zegers, below on facing page)

element is the change in Castillo, who is heard at one point voicing leftist sentiments about following the example of Ho Chi Minh; despite such rhetoric, he quickly becomes a meek servant of the new order (not that, under military surveillance, he has much choice).

It is not clear precisely what Larraín is saying about 1973 Chile. The suggestion perhaps is that the nation was already in a state of somnambulistic denial – of the kind depicted in *Tony Manero* – even before the coup. Indeed the entertainment at the theatre visited by Mario – a cancan line, a weary stand-up and, judging from the manager's comments, some raunchier fodder – is a horribly archaic, deadened form of bread and circuses. The implication is that – unlike the *morts vivants* Mario, Nancy and Castillo – only those who resisted and were slaughtered had a true claim to be alive.

Not that this is a world entirely without hope or compassion – Mario's colleague Sandra protests bitterly at the horrors that the

morgue workers are made to participate in, though her cries are silenced by a soldier's warning gunshots, signifying that her card too is marked. There's a certain compassionate gentleness in Mario's comportment, too: dragging a corpse-laden trolley down the morgue's basement corridor, his actions suggest respectful duty, as if he's become Charon, ferrying the dead to the underworld. Notably, he and Sandra try and save a lone survivor from the hecatomb; but it's typical of the film's subtlety that the wounded man – and the hospital nurse who takes him in – are simply glimpsed later, without commentary, as bodies on the pile.

Despite his capacity for quiet resistance, however, Mario finally embraces the new order's death drive. The difficulty of the film stems from the way it presents the cataclysm from the perspective of a disturbed protagonist, the horror of 1973 conflated with the turbulence of Mario's psyche in a harrowing final image in which he finally becomes not just death's attendant but its executor. This grim tableau, observed with chill matter-of-factness, puts the final stamp on an enigmatic but utterly distinctive and troubling film.

*For credits and synopsis, see page 72*

## The hidden zones

*Pablo Larraín on the genesis and visual style of 'Post Mortem'*

The idea for 'Post Mortem' arose from a news story I read about a man, Mario Cornejo, who along with some renowned doctors carried out the autopsy on former president Salvador Allende, on the day of the military coup. This little article in the newspaper inspired us to create this tale, based on the story of this anonymous man, about the oversights that separate official history from the true protagonists of a momentous event in the history of our country. What circumstances allowed this man, Mario Cornejo, to participate so actively in Chile's history without being noticed? That question triggered this story.

I grew up hearing tales about the military coup. Since I didn't live through it, this event has turned into a sealed box – an enigma that has captured my imagination and that of my whole generation. It disturbs me, it follows me, it interests me, and it moves me. This is why, in my last two films, those eventful days have been the setting and context in which to develop intimate stories about very marginal individuals. It allows you to look very closely at the possibility of making analogies and imposing some absurdity between these very private stories and the recounting of



PABLO LARRAÍN

the 'great story'. I hope that something phantasmagorical and inscrutable remains, to illuminate the memory of the past.

I originally thought of using a handheld camera that could capture the scenes as live testimonies. But when the filming began I decided to practically not move the camera and set it up as a fly on the wall: almost inert, observing the facts cautiously, horizontally, as if the world extended itself beyond the confines of the frame only on either side, without heaven, without God nor Earth. The landscape look, with anamorphic lenses, is a panoramic view that hides a lot, and it is in the hidden zones that the true mystery lies.

# Aarakshan

India 2011

Director: Prakash Jha

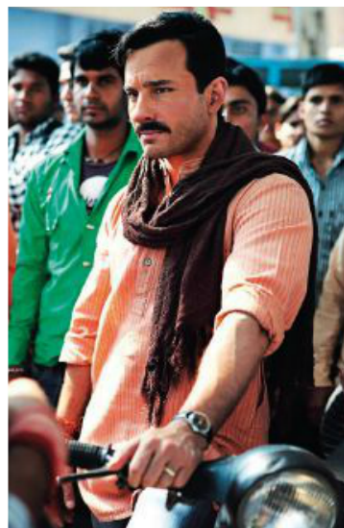
Certificate PG 164m 29s

Prakash Jha has made a career out of directing films that tackle burning Indian social and political issues head-on. *Damul* (1985), for instance, dealt with India's age-old bonded labour problem, *Gangaajal* (2003) police brutality, and *Raajneeti* (2010) corruption in contemporary Indian politics. With *Aarakshan*, Jha tackles his most contentious issue yet: the reservation of a percentage of government jobs and university places for India's lower castes. In a society riven by caste differences even 64 years after independence, this is a sociopolitical hot potato, and one that has caused riots and even deaths in India: the higher castes demand a simple meritocracy, while the lower castes argue that reservation is the first step in affirmative action to redress centuries of oppression and social inequality.

In *Aarakshan*, Dr Anand is the principal of a private educational institution not subject to government reservation rulings. A high-caste but scrupulously fair man, he falls foul of his colleagues because he believes in offering opportunities to lower-caste students. Jha maintains a pro-reservation line throughout the film, though much screen time is devoted to debates about the issue, looking at both sides of the argument. Jha's real grouse is, however, with the expensive private coaching set-ups that reduce education to a business – Anand's crusade in the film is mainly against this.

While Jha's intentions are noble, the film alas is lengthy and preachy, with far too many teaching montages throwing mathematic formulae at the audience. When Jha makes Anand fall from grace, to enable his triumphant resurrection later, the descent is contrived, unrealistic and unbelievable. The didactic tone grates after a while, and too many homilies are delivered on the Indian education system.

What saves the film is Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan's imperious performance as Anand. As a principled, idealistic and sometimes impractical educationist, Bachchan is believable and nuanced, conveying magnificently



Caste aside: Saif Ali Khan

a teacher's joy in his students' success. Unfortunately, his is the only fully fleshed-out and realised character in the entire film. The others are mere satellites revolving around him, and he is left with no one to play off against. The film was pre-emptively banned, sight unseen, in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, for fear that it might incite inter-caste violence. The governments of those states needn't have worried: *Aarakshan* is as non-incendiary and middle-of-the-road as it gets.

♦♦ Naman Ramachandran

## CREDITS

**Producers**  
Prakash Jha  
Firoz A. Nadiadwala  
**Screenplay**  
Prakash Jha  
Anjum Rajabali  
**Director of Photography**  
Sachin K. Krishna  
**Editor**  
Santosh Mandal  
**Music**  
Sharika Ehsaan Loy  
**Background Music**  
Wayne Sharp  
**Costume Designer**  
Priyanka Mundada

**Production Companies**  
A.A. Nadiadwala  
presents  
Base Industries Group  
a Prakash Jha  
Productions film

## CAST

**Amitabh Bachchan**  
Prabhakar Anand  
**Saif Ali Khan**  
Deepak Kumar  
**Deepika Padukone**  
Poorbi Anand  
**Manoj Bajpayee**  
Mithlesh Singh  
**Prateik Babbar**  
Sushant Seth  
**Tanvi Azmi**  
Prabhakar Anand's wife,  
Poorbi's mother  
**Hema Malini**  
Chetan Pandit  
**Mukesh Tiwari**  
Yashpal Sharma  
**Darshan Jariwala**  
Saurabh Shukla

**In Colour**  
Subtitles  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Reliance Entertainment

14,803 ft +8 frames

# Attenberg

Greece 2010

Director: Athina Rachel Tsangari

Certificate 18 97m 1s

I don't know if Sir David Attenborough watches a lot of Greek indie films but if he catches writer-director Athina Rachel Tsangari's second feature he may be somewhat hurt. Not only is the title a blatant misspelling based on the mispronunciation of his name, but also his wildlife programmes are used to symbolise everything that's strange about the film's central character, Marina (Ariane Labeled). Unable to make real connections in the human world, 23-year-old Marina prefers to sit, entranced, as Attenborough explains how animals communicate; she even likes to mimic them, grunting and beating her chest like a gorilla, or performing the mating dances of birds. Her architect father Spyros (Vangelis Mourikis) and Bella (Evangelia Randou), her only friend, go along with her strangeness, but both in their own way try to get her interested in real-life sex and relationships. Her father's anxiety is all the more urgent because he is dying of cancer, so finally Marina selects a random man (Yorgos Lanthimos) – a regular client at the taxi firm where she works as a driver – and with infinite awkwardness tries to have sex with him.

A simple summary of the plot makes the film sound like the demented hybrid of a sensitive coming-of-age story and *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) – but it's not even as sensible as that. The laboured set-up is really just an excuse for a series of strange and disturbing vignettes. Some of them, such as the intermittent shots of Marina and Bella doing synchronised silly walks, wearing almost identical dresses, seem like acting exercises from a particularly pretentious drama class; others, such as the intimate, interesting conversations Marina has with her dying father in hospital, promise an emotional maturity the rest of the film fails – in fact doesn't even try – to deliver. And many more – for example the grimly unappealing lesbian 'kiss' that opens the film, or indeed any of the 'sex' scenes between Labeled and Lanthimos – seem designed simply to make the audience squirm. The point might be to let us in a little on Marina's inability to understand why she ought to want such things, or it might simply be Tsangari's way of playing with cinematic expectations.



Evangelia Randou, Ariane Labeled

What the film does offer though is a fascinating portrait of a Greece tourists don't see. Off-season, and without a bowl of overpriced taramasalata in sight, this is a place of dead streets, cold shingle beaches, empty cafés and decaying industrial machinery. Spyros's despair over the legacy of the 20th century makes him welcome death. "It looks like we were designing future ruins," he says sadly, surveying the dull and regimented skyline. These sections come like sudden bursts of meaning and insight in a patchy film far too in love with its irritatingly over-egged quirkiness. They hint at a filmmaker with something rather interesting to say, if only she can get around to saying it next time.

♦♦ Lisa Mullen

## CREDITS

**Producers**  
Maria Hatzakou  
Yorgos Lanthimos  
Iraklis Mavroides  
Athina Rachel Tsangari  
Angelos Venetis  
**Screenplay**  
Athina Rachel Tsangari  
**Director of Photography**  
Thimios Bakatakis  
**Editors**  
Sandrine Cheyrol  
Matt Johnson  
**Production Designer**  
Defini Kalogianni  
**Sound**  
Leandros Ntounis  
**Costume Designers**  
Thanos Papastergiou  
Vassilia Rozana

©Haos Films  
**Production Companies**  
Haos Films in co-production with Greek Film Centre, Falero House Productions, Boo Productions, Stefi Productions with the support of The MEDIA

Programme of the European Union  
**Executive Producer**  
Christos V. Konstantakopoulos

## CAST

**Ariane Labeled**  
Marina  
**Vangelis Mourikis**  
Spyros  
**Evangelia Randou**  
Bella  
**Yorgos Lanthimos**  
engineer  
**Kostas Berikopoulos**  
undertaker  
**Michel Demopoulos**  
hospital manager

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Artificial Eye Film Company  
  
8,731 ft +8 frames

**SYNOPSIS** Bhopal, India, 2008. Dr Prabhakar Anand is the idealistic principal of a privately owned college where his daughter Poorbi studies and her boyfriend Deepak Kumar lectures. Sushant Seth, who is higher caste, is Poorbi's classmate. The Indian administration passes a bill that reserves a quota of government jobs and university places for the lower castes of society. Though Anand belongs to a higher caste he believes in giving opportunities to members of the lower castes, such as Kumar. The reservation issue causes confrontations between Kumar and Seth. After accusing Anand of being prejudiced against the lower castes, Kumar leaves to pursue a doctorate in the US.

The college's vice-principal Mithlesh Singh has a thriving side business giving private coaching. When Anand questions him about this – it is against college rules – Singh engineers an uproar which forces Anand to resign. Anand also has to give up his college quarters; he finds himself on the streets, since his own house is being used as a private coaching institute thanks to Singh's trickery. Anand begins giving free classes in a stable directly opposite; he is helped by Seth and Kumar, who have seen the error of their ways. The stable classes gain better results than Singh's private classes, and Anand is reinstated at the college.

**SYNOPSIS** Greece, present day. Twenty-three-year-old Marina tries to come to terms with her sexuality while also coping with her father's cancer. Her only friend, Bella, has plenty of boyfriends; she tries to advise Marina about sex, but Marina fails to feel any attraction for either men or women, and the two of them bicker. Marina's closest relationship is with her father Spyros, with whom she watches David Attenborough wildlife documentaries on video. The ritualistic animal behaviour depicted on screen seems no more strange to her than the mating rituals of humans. Realising that he is dying, Marina's father urges her to go out into the world and form bonds with other people.

Marina awkwardly approaches one of the regular clients at the taxi company where she works, and tries to have sex with him, but she acts so strangely that she leaves him nonplussed. Meanwhile she arranges her father's funeral according to his instructions, and talks Bella into seducing him in his hospital room. After her father's death, Marina grieves quietly, still locked in her own world.



Naked aggression: Paul Bettany

## Broken Lines

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Sallie Aprahamian

TV director Sallie Aprahamian's feature debut was made in 2008 but is only now getting a belated UK release, slightly surprising given names like Paul Bettany, Olivia Williams and Rita Tushingham on the cast list. Or maybe not. This ragged, stuttering tale of two miserable souls held back by unfulfilling relationships, whose brief but charged romance propels them into new lives, never really gets under the skin of its characters or brings its themes into clear focus, despite straining every sinew.

The script is written by actors Doraly Rosa and Dan Fredenburgh, who also star as B and Jake. Shaken to the core by his father's recent death, property developer Jake, engaged to Zoe (Williams), is increasingly drawn back to his roots in Finsbury Park's Jewish community. While lingering in and around his dead father's tailor's shop, he takes a shine to B, a bored waitress in a local café coming to terms with her new role as carer to her stroke-victim boyfriend (Bettany). Before long the inevitable affair has ignited that will force each to make difficult decisions about their preferred direction in life.

The two leads go at it gamely, but you still can't help wondering how things would have shaped up if Bettany and Williams had taken those roles, instead of relatively peripheral ones. Strange that they, and/or their agents, should have agreed, especially as the script isn't exactly incisive. Jake's behaviour in the throes of grief is never quite convincing, and once the romance kicks in, clichés abound – a tryst on a beach, some coy sex, a trite 'follow your dreams' message.

Other promising elements are barely followed up on – a voyeurism subplot (ludicrously linked to impeded artistic impulses), a property-development storyline left dangling, a glancing account of Jake's relationship with his mother and her new lover. And the protagonists' Jewishness, while

clearly important, is never explored in any depth. Problems of a superficial script trying to cram too much in are compounded by unimaginative direction, the sluggish pacing undermining any possibility of snap to the narrative. DP Jean-Louis Bompont does bring an outsider's eye to Finsbury Park and presents it as a nervy, claustrophobic, traffic-clogged interzone (no surprises there), but tends to over-rely on blue and orange filters.

Aprahamian's avowed interest in drama rooted in emotions (is there any that isn't?) reaches its apogee in Bettany's overwrought performance; he inhabits his self-pitying, volatile character with such a shuddering Method-like intensity it threatens to unbalance the whole enterprise. It's

hard to figure out why B cares for him, but then it's hard to figure out B at all. She's depicted as an ungainly singer-songwriter in waiting, but despite the guitar slung over her shoulder by the film's end and the new aura of confidence, we're never shown any evidence of her musical passion, only told about it. Williams's character is the most shortchanged (and has the least screen time), but in some ways the most unwittingly revealing. The romantic notions of urban grit and authenticity this film is prey to mean that Williams's bourgeois career woman in a tidy suburban home registers as uptight and square, even desexualised. The notion that she too could be pursuing a dream barely merits consideration.

✦ Kieron Corless

### CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Douglas Cummins  
**Screenplay**  
Dan Fredenburgh  
Doraly Rosa  
**Director of Photography**  
Jean-Louis Bompont  
**Editor**  
Brand Thurmim  
**Production Designer**  
Mike Kane  
**Sound Designer**  
Kevin Brazier  
**Costume Designer**  
Caroline Harris

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**Production Companies**  
An Axiom Films production in association with Aria Films and Matador Pictures  
**Executive Producers**  
Nigel Thomas  
Charlotte Walls  
Pablo Salame  
Jen Gatten  
Diandra Douglas  
Dan Fredenburgh  
Doraly Rosa  
Luke Montagu

### CAST

**Dan Fredenburgh**  
Jake Levy

**Doraly Rosa**  
B  
**Paul Bettany**  
Chester  
**Olivia Williams**  
Zoe  
**Harriet Walter**  
Leah  
**Nathan Constance**  
Yoss  
**Nicholas Le Prevost**  
Alistair  
**Rita Tushingham**  
Rae  
**Sidney Kean**  
David  
**Tim Woodward**  
Christopher  
**Malcolm Frederick**  
community leader

**Joan Linder**  
difficult old lady

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Axiom Films Limited

## Captain America The First Avenger

USA 2011

Director: Joe Johnston

Certificate 12A 123m 59s

Marvel's ongoing scheme to tie all the characters whose movie rights it controls into a coherent universe continues with *Captain America The First Avenger*, which picks up on references to a super-soldier formula in *The Incredible Hulk* (2008) and the star-spangled shield in *Iron Man 2* (2010) and empowers its villain with the Asgardian artefact (a 'cosmic cube') seen in the coda of this year's *Thor*. It brings on Howard Stark, father of Iron Man Tony, as a key player in the creation of Captain America, and perhaps inevitably winds up with a meeting with Samuel L. Jackson's Nick Fury. In a tangle that will never be sorted out, ex-Human Torch Chris Evans – from the Fantastic Four films made at another studio and thus exiled from this reality – takes the lead as skinny Steve Rogers, passing by the golden-age Human Torch before he is transformed from CGI runt into super-soldier (an effect that would be more convincing without the added burden of 3D).

Of all Marvel's tentpole characters, Captain America is the hardest sell in contemporary terms. Created by writer Joe Simon and artist Jack Kirby in 1941, he originally fought Nazis and monsters (as demonstrated by arch-nemesis Red Skull, the original strip was as gothic-horrific as patriotic) but found himself less popular in peacetime. In 1964, writer-editor-publisher Stan Lee and Kirby literally revived the character, having the Avengers discover him frozen since 1945.

Incarnating the ideals of a nation was unproblematic in 1941, but has been difficult for post-1960s versions of the character (after Watergate, Steve Rogers was so disillusioned as to take off the flag suit for a while). Whereas the desultory 1990 *Captain America* rushed through its WWII set-up and dwelled on the 'man out of time' business (presumably saved for the forthcoming *The Avengers*, if not *Captain America 2*), the new film plumps defiantly for a retro feel even in niceties such as the colour process. Unfashionably, Evans's Steve Rogers does the right thing because it's right, not because of any traumatic loss; in the comics, the death of his best friend 'Bucky' Barnes (who eventually showed up alive) fulfilled this plot function, and it's possible that Sebastian Stan's Barnes is just MIA after a seeming death plunge.

Director Joe Johnston went the retro route in the underrated *The Rocketeer* (1991), and again catches the 1940s tone well: the film finds an acceptable rationale for the Captain America persona, complete with musical number and comic-book merchandise. The problem is a familiar Marvel shortcoming: so much is set up for future episodes that this one feels



**Saboteur: Richard Armitage**

sketchy. Hugo Weaving's Red Skull, a perfect Max von Sydow imitation, is so iconically evil that there's no bite to his arch-nemesis standard (Loki and Magneto are much more complex), and his organisation's Nazi-inflected mix of magic and mad science feels like a *Hellboy* knock-off. Hayley Atwell's chaste love interest is perfunctory,

Stanley Tucci and Tommy Lee Jones are fun but bystanders, and the second half of the film plays like one of those feature-length cutdowns of 12-episode serials (there was a 1944 Captain America serial) which rush through the action highlights while trimming the context.

◆◆ **Kim Newman**

## CREDITS

### Produced by

Kevin Feige

### Screenplay

Christopher Markus  
Stephen McFeely  
Based on the Marvel  
Comic by Joe Simon,  
Jack Kirby

### Director of

Photography

Shelly Johnson

### Editors

Jeffrey Ford  
Robert Dalva

### Production Designer

Rick Heinrichs

### Music Composed and

Conducted by

Alan Silvestri

### Sound Design

Stephen Hunter Flick  
Shannon Mills  
Jason W. Jennings  
Daniel Pagan

### Costume Designer

Anna B. Sheppard

### Visual Effects and

### Animation

Double Negative

### Visual Effects

Lola | VFX

FrameStore

The Senate Visual

Effects Limited

Fuel VFX

Trixter

Look Effects

Whiskeytree, Inc.

Luma Pictures

Evil Eye Pictures

Rise | Visual Effects

Studios

Method

### Stunt Co-ordinator

Steve Dent

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### Production

Companies

Paramount Pictures and

Marvel Entertainment

present a Marvel

Studios production

A film by Joe Johnston

### Executive Producers

Louis D'Esposito

Joe Johnston

Nigel Gostelow

Alan Fine

Stan Lee

David Maisel

## CAST

### Chris Evans

Steve Rogers, 'Captain

America'

### Tommy Lee Jones

Colonel Chester Phillips

### Hugo Weaving

Johann Schmidt, 'Red

Skull'

### Hayley Atwell

Peggy Carter

### Sebastian Stan

James Buchanan

'Bucky' Barnes

### Dominic Cooper

Howard Stark

### Samuel L. Jackson

Nick Fury

### Toby Jones

Dr Armin Zola

### Derek Luke

Gabe Jones

### Neal McDonough

Timothy 'Dum Dum'

Dugan

### Bruno Ricci

Jacques Dernier

### JJ Feild

James Montgomery

Falsworth

### Kenneth Choi

Jim Morita

### Richard Armitage

Heinz Kruger

### Stanley Tucci

Dr Abraham Erskine

### Dolby Digital/Datasat

Digital Sound/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

### Part-subtitled

### Distributor

Paramount Pictures UK

Some screenings

presented in 3D

11,158 ft +8 frames

# The Change-up

USA/Japan 2011

Director: David Dobkin

Certificate 15 112m 19s

One half of the American poster for *The Change-up* depicts Ryan Reynolds with his hands on two adoring, long-haired girls, his mouth open in stupefied delight; the other half shows Jason Bateman grimly holding two babies. The film isn't quite as sexist as its poster, though that's not a major feat. Openly aping Judd Apatow's work (complete with his wife Leslie Mann, once more in the part of the marital punch bag whose loving presence smothers her husband), *The Change-up* is a hoary body-swap comedy. Lawyer Dave (Bateman) envies the carefree existence of his pal Mitch (Reynolds), an actor who spends most of his time smoking pot and bedding random women. Mitch, for his part, claims to envy Dave's family: "You're never lonely," he tells him. Later, once they've swapped bodies, Mitch admits that he was just "trying to be nice" – but it's too late: now he has to change all the nappies, while Dave can laze about and finally make his move on attractive assistant Sabrina (Olivia Wilde).

Thanks largely to Bateman and Reynolds's sharp comic timing, *The Change-up* is watchable enough. Bateman has perfected the role of the long-suffering but resilient everyman, while Reynolds is equally adept at fast-talking glibness, suggesting a more loutish Robert Downey Jr. The farcical contortions they undergo are beyond stupid: no matter how much he's avoided adult responsibilities so far, it's hard to believe that Mitch would march into Dave's office and stuff his pockets with free food before mocking a group of Japanese businessmen with invitations to pound some sake bombs. His quick mastery of the complexities of law is as implausible as his temporary embrace of family life, while Dave's sudden desire to return to his wife and kids – one that hits him just as Sabrina is disrobing – is equally unconvincing and pro forma. As depicted, his life is a hell of screaming babies and constant overwork; aside from the fact that family values have to win out in this morally conventional Hollywood

comedy, there's no apparent reason Dave should want to go home.

Still, Bateman and Reynolds get to be funny. Mann, on the other hand, is required to defecate with the door open and cry over a prospective divorce, while Wilde gets to say, in the middle of a first date, "You never did tell me about your childhood" – a reminder to the viewer that Mitch's callous ways are the product of neglectful cameo dad Alan Arkin, as rote an explanation as possible.

Occasionally, there are signs that someone intended a light social critique beneath the crassness: when Dave's boss casually snaps, "You look like a Jew" to a badly dressed Mitch, it's a moment of casual anti-Semitism from the rich and untouchable. But the moment passes without anything further coming of it: all that's left is some banter, a few memorable comic set pieces and lots of jokes about testicles. Director David Dobkin and cinematographer Eric Edwards deserve commendation for the clean, refreshingly competent widescreen framing, as do their cast for doing their best in the face of some occasionally vile material.

◆◆ **Vadim Rizov**

## CREDITS

### Produced by

David Dobkin

Neal H. Moritz

### Screenplay

Jon Lucas

Scott Moore

### Director of

Photography

Eric Edwards

### Editors

Lee Haxall

Greg Hayden

### Production Designer

Barry Robison

### Music

John Debney

### Sound Designer

Tim Chau

### Costume Designer

Betsy Heimann

©Universal Studios

### Production

Companies

Universal Pictures

presents in association

with Relativity Media

an Original Film/Big Kid

Pictures production

A David Dobkin film

### Executive Producers

Joe Caracciolo Jr

Ori Marmur

Jeff Kleeman

Jonathon Kornack

Martin

## CAST

Ryan Reynolds

Mitch Planko

Jason Bateman

Dave Lockwood

Leslie Mann

Jamie Lockwood

Olivia Wilde

Sabrina McArdle

Craig Bierko

Vaitan

Gregory Itzin

Flemming Steel

Alan Arkin

Mitch's dad

Mircea Monroe

Tatiana

Ned Schmidtke

Ted Norton

Ming Lo

Ken Kinkabe

Sydney Rouviere

Carra Lockwood

Dax Griffin

blow-dried goon

### Dolby Digital/Datasat

Digital Sound/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

### Distributor

Universal Pictures

International UK & Eire

10,108 ft +8 frames

**SYNOPSIS** Norway, 1942. Johann Schmidt, head of Hydra, a mystic-scientific faction affiliated with Nazi Germany, harnesses a supernatural power source connected with the gods of Asgard. In New York, undersized Steve Rogers persistently tries to enlist in the army but is turned down; he feels worse about this because his best friend James 'Bucky' Barnes is in uniform. However, refugee scientist Abraham Erskine nominates Steve for the 'super-soldier' programme; this enhances human potential and was once imperfectly applied to Schmidt.

Steve demonstrates his character in training under sceptical Colonel Chester Phillips and sympathetic agent Peggy Carter. In a secret facility in Brooklyn, Steve is injected with Erskine's serum and subjected to an electrical treatment by engineer Howard Stark; he emerges as a peak human specimen with heightened reflexes. A spy murders Erskine and the formula is lost. Intended as the first of a super-army, Steve instead becomes a propaganda tool, dressing up in a uniform as 'Captain America' at war-bond rallies.

In Europe, Steve learns that a unit of commandos including Barnes has been captured by Hydra, which has grown so powerful that it no longer follows Hitler's orders. In costume, Steve rescues the soldiers and insists he stay in action, leading a unit to destroy Hydra's scientific bases. During one mission, Barnes is killed; Steve becomes even more determined to stop Schmidt, who no longer conceals the deformity that Erskine's formula has wrought on him and is now known as Red Skull. When the final Hydra base is taken, Schmidt sets out in an advanced long-range bomber to destroy New York. Steve boards the plane and thwarts the scheme. Red Skull seems to be destroyed by his own power source. The plane crashes in the Arctic.

In the present day, Steve awakes to find himself a man out of time, and meets SHIELD agent Nick Fury.

# Conan the Barbarian

USA 2011

Director: Marcus Nispel

Certificate 15 112m 16s

There is a memorable scene in the 1982 film of *Conan* in which Robert E. Howard's barbarian hero, as incarnated by a young Arnold Schwarzenegger, is shown under the slave driver's lash, harnessed to a massive millstone that he must turn in perpetuity. Like much in John Milius's film, this is a bit ridiculous – what does that wheel *do* anyway? – but it also functions as a primal, powerful image, devised by someone who understands myth: Superman in bondage.

There is no equivalent scene in Marcus Nispel's relaunched or remade or rebooted *Conan*. When Jason Momoa's Cimmerian, in an early scene, leads a raid on a slaver's camp, his fury at the sight of men in chains is merely the sign of a noble personality, with / no hard, physical resentment behind it. It's representative of shortcut filmmaking, in which narrative tissue is liposuctioned out to create more room for sword-swinging spectacle, with a dulcet Morgan Freeman voiceover that puts one in mind of penguin documentaries.

It is right that a new *Conan* film must look for its own identity, but one immediately notices that in the absence of Milius's saga-paced direction, Basil Poledouris's martial, huffing soundtrack and Schwarzenegger's special-effect physique, very little has been introduced to replace them. This *Conan the Barbarian* is in '3D', but the technique is so little in evidence that I very much doubt any viewer would notice if not alerted to it by the poster and an irritating pressure on the bridge of the nose. Where the film should rebuild Howard's world from the ground up, this *Conan* rests on its inscribed audience's presale memories.

For backstory, we have much material involving son Conan and his father, played not surprisingly by Ron Perlman, and a scene in which a preteen Conan shows off his precocious fighting poise by flying into a pack of hostile tribesmen with wolverine-like ferocity, sending them off one after another to the accompaniment of much crunching of gristle and bone. The film has impact – you can't deny that of something that begins with a newborn child being plucked out of a sword wound – but this is not the same as having weight. Momoa, peering between sheets of hair, practises a glower and a feline grin but hasn't the Frank Frazetta-painting-made-flesh visual impact of his predecessor, while the setting remains as faint as the dramatis personae – one experiences less a diverse, physical world that the cast are questing through than a flipbook of establishing shots of castles and kingdoms, fantasy-art postcards.

Nispel is a commercial director whose career largely consists of remaking famously gory titles



Wild child: Jason Momoa

(*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th*), and his work here is roundly competent if precious little else. He cuts with the action, and he shoots the sanguinary swordplay lucidly, so you can tell who's thrusting what in to whom.

Where *Conan* fails is in giving the viewer the slightest encouragement to care about that what and whom. What entertainment there is comes from the played-up camp elements: the incestuous interplay between Stephen Lang and Rose McGowan as warlord Khalar Zym and his daughter Marique;

the Cro-Magnon way Conan has with the opposite sex, dragging Rachel Nichols's Tamara from kingdom to kingdom with monosyllabic disregard; the chunks of hoary Howard dialogue ("I live, I love, I slay and am content") that serve no purpose but to look good in the trailer. But *Conan* is no great shakes as a comedy either, and it is worth noting that *Your Highness*, David Gordon Green's parody of Dungeons & Dragons medievalism, got closer to the brawny emotions of a good quest film than this grave, trivial tribute. **Nick Pinkerton**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Fredrik Malmberg  
Boaz Davidson  
George Furla  
Danny Lerner  
John Baldecchi  
Les Weldon  
Joe Gatta  
Henry Winterstern  
**Screenplay**  
Thomas Dean Donnelly  
Joshua Oppenheimer  
Sean Hood  
Based on the character of Conan as originally created by Robert E. Howard  
**Director of Photography**  
Thomas Kloss  
**Editor**  
Ken Blackwell  
**Production Designer**  
Chris August  
**Music**  
Tyler Bates  
**Sound Recordist**  
Petar Kadyisi  
**Costume Designer**  
Wendy Partridge

## Stunt Co-ordinators

David Leitch  
Noon Orsatti  
**Visual Effects**  
Worldwide FX  
(Sofia, Bulgaria)  
Worldwide FX  
(Shreveport, Louisiana)  
©Conan Productions, Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
Lionsgate and Millennium Films  
present a Millennium Films production in association with EFF Independent Productions  
A Conan Properties International LLC production  
**Executive Producers**  
Frederick Fierst  
Avi Lerner  
Danny Dimbort  
Trevor Short  
Eda Kowan  
John Sacchi  
Michael Paseornek  
Jason Constantine

## CAST

Jason Momoa  
Conan  
Rachel Nichols  
Tamara  
Stephen Lang  
Khalar Zym  
Rose McGowan  
Marique  
Said Taghmaoui  
Ela-Shan  
Ron Perlman  
Corin  
Leo Howard  
young Conan  
Steve O'Donnell  
Lucius  
Raad Rawi  
Fassir, high priest  
Nonsio Anozie  
Artus  
Bob Sapp  
Ukafa  
Milton Welsh  
Remo

[Uncredited]  
Morgan Freeman  
Narrator

Dolby Digital/DTS/  
SDDS  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

Some screenings  
presented in 3D

**3D version**  
112m 13s  
10,099 ft +8 frames

**2D version**  
112m 16s  
10,103 ft +14 frames

# Cowboys & Aliens

USA 2011

Director: Jon Favreau

Certificate 12A 118m 23s

The past months have seen some very different takes on the western: the Coen brothers' quality mainstream remake *True Grit*, Kelly Reichardt's elliptical odyssey *Meek's Cutoff*, and Gore Verbinski's animated *Rango*. The title of *Cowboys & Aliens*, though, recalls two cult-film hybrids remembered only for their titles: *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter* and *Billy the Kid vs. Dracula*, both directed by William Beaudine and double-billed in 1966. Like them, *Cowboys & Aliens* is an upfront mash-up. The trailer shows a posse of horsemen in an Arizona township, staring out at a turbulent night suddenly lit by fires... which resolve into alien craft blasting straight towards them.

It feels slightly incongruous that such a hybrid isn't cast with newcomers, rather than headliners Daniel Craig, Harrison Ford and Sam Rockwell. Craig is, for a time, the film's Man With No Name, introduced sitting in the wilderness with a strange metal bracelet on his wrist. He has no memories, for reasons that are fairly obvious given the 'aliens' bit of the title. Looking suitably weathered, Craig's character has the most downbeat arc, but after the early scenes (his entry into town is gratifyingly measured), he doesn't have enough space to be truly interesting. His edgiest moment, with a flash of Bond misogyny, is when he's approached by comely mystery woman Olivia Wilde in a bar. "I'm just here to drink," he snaps.

Ford plays a cattle owner who is first seen tying a lackey between horses, before the curmudgeon's inevitable softening. This gets drawn out through the picture, as Ford's crusty colonel is forced to adopt a teenager whose grandfather has been abducted by aliens. The process is made palatable by Ford's spirited playing – when he's bereaved in battle, he seems to age on screen – and by a grisly war story he tells on the trail, which is intense enough to have an edge of black humour. Rockwell, one of the film's true surprises, is entirely subdued as a barman seeking his stolen wife.

The aliens are merely crude brutes, though their craft are more distinctive – low-flying metal hunks farting black smoke. (The film is cheerfully earthy, with some unhygienic Wild West surgery and a bystander who encounters the aliens while doing his business in a river.) There's no reference to the irony of Ford's racist colonel accepting Native Americans as allies even while the non-human invaders are treated as an undifferentiated mass; and the way the aliens bring the warring terrestrials together feels stodgy after the recent *Attack the Block*.

Directed by Jon Favreau of the *Iron Man* films, *Cowboys & Aliens* has a baseline predictability that makes it hard to get very involved in the

**SYNOPSIS** Cimmeria, the Hyborian Age. A baby is born in the midst of battle and his warrior mother killed. The child, Conan, is brought up by his father, and from an early age shows a remarkable instinct for war. The young Conan's father is killed by a raiding party.

As a young man, Conan seeks out his father's murderers. He meets and becomes the protector of Tamara; she has been chased from her monastery by Khalar Zym and his sorcerer daughter Marique, who need her royal blood for a ritual that grants immortality. Khalar and Marique are also, in fact, the murderers Conan has been seeking. Conan attempts to lead them into a trap using Tamara as bait, but he is thwarted by Marique's magic. When Tamara is taken captive, Conan breaks into Zym's fortress and disrupts the sacrificial ceremony. Zym and Marique are vanquished in an epic battle. Conan reinstates Tamara at the monastery.



Close encounters of the absurd kind: Harrison Ford, Daniel Craig

expensive, high-speed action sequences, despite their unusual framings in canyons and deserts. On the other hand, the film works happily as an unambitious yarn. The end is left wide open for a sequel, given that one of the main characters has been shown to have phoenix-like powers of survival.

Andrew Osmond

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Brian Grazer  
Ron Howard  
Alex Kurtzman  
Roberto Orci  
Scott Mitchell  
Rosenberg  
**Screenplay**  
Roberto Orci  
Alex Kurtzman  
Damon Lindelof  
Mark Fergus  
Hawk Ostby  
**Screen Story**  
Mark Fergus  
Hawk Ostby  
Steve Oedekerk  
Based on Platinum  
Studios' *Cowboys and  
Aliens* by Scott Mitchell  
Rosenberg  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Matthew Libatique

**Editors**  
Dan Leblant  
Jim May  
**Production Designer**  
Scott Chambliss  
**Music by/Orchestra  
Conducted by**  
Harry Gregson-Williams  
**Sound Designers**  
Christopher Boyes  
David Farmer  
**Costume Designer**  
Mary Zophres  
**Visual Effects and  
Animation**  
Industrial Light & Magic  
**Additional Visual  
Effects**  
The Embassy Visual  
Effects  
Ghost VFX  
Fuel VFX  
The Garage VFX, Inc.  
**Visual Effects**  
Shade FX

**Alien Character and  
Effects Designed and  
Created by**  
Legacy Effects  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Tom Harper

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DreamWorks II  
Distribution Co., LLC  
**Production Company**  
DreamWorks Pictures,  
Universal Pictures and  
Reliance Entertainment  
present in association  
with Relativity Media  
an Imagine  
Entertainment / K/O  
Paper Products /  
Fairview Entertainment  
/ Platinum Studios  
production  
A Jon Favreau film  
**Executive Producers**  
Steven Spielberg  
Jon Favreau  
Denis L. Stewart  
Bobby Cohen  
Randy Greenberg  
Ryan Kavanaugh

**Sam Rockwell**  
Doc, saloon owner  
**Adam Beach**  
Nat Colorado  
**Paul Dano**  
Percy Dolarhyde  
**Noah Ringer**  
Emmett Taggart  
**Abigail Spencer**  
Alice  
**Clancy Brown**  
Meacham, preacher  
**Ana de la Reguera**  
Maria, Doc's wife  
**Keith Carradine**  
Sheriff John Taggart

**Dolby Digital/Datasat  
Digital Sound/SDDS  
In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Paramount Pictures UK

10,654 ft +8 frames

## CAST

**Daniel Craig**  
Jake Lonergan  
**Harrison Ford**  
Colonel Woodrow  
Dolarhyde  
**Olivia Wilde**  
Ella Swenson

# Crazy Stupid Love

USA 2011

**Directors:** Glenn Ficarra,  
John Requa

**Certificate** 12A 117m 54s

Learning to love the contemporary romantic comedy can feel like 'settling' for second best, as the supergenre's typical truth-telling best-friend character might describe it. So it goes with Glenn Ficarra and John Requa's second feature: screwball-plotted for some gratifying smash-ups yet overly engineered; focusing on a near-divorcee as he poignantly abandons his new one-night-stand freedom for eager self-flagellation yet remaining conspicuously silent on his equally fragile partner's mindset; boasting a critical mass of charisma among its actors yet regularly undermined by a plot-supporting pair of adolescent crushes that shade from awkward into off-putting.

Steve Carell plays the easily pitiable Cal, whose high-school-sweetheart wife Emily (Julianne Moore) announces her desire to separate following her affair with a co-worker (Kevin Bacon). Thus blindsided, Cal digs in at a bar for nightly wallows where he is noticed by charming lothario Jacob (Ryan Gosling); makeover montages and Cal's first pick-ups soon follow. Meanwhile Cal's son Robbie, a precocious crank/romantic, besieges his not-much-older babysitter Jessica, who in turn nurses an improbable crush on the father of her charge. Also lurking on the Jack-and-Jill diagram is fetching, play-it-safe lawyer Hannah (Emma Stone), a sceptical early target of Jacob's whose full import is eventually revealed.

While all this activity suggests the strenuously expressed 'love makes fools

of us all' sentiment of the title, there's a slowly and surely turning axis at the centre of the film: Cal and Emily may get crazy and stupid during their time apart but these are just stops on the way to re-recognising love. This plot scheme, while common and useful from a screenwriter's point of view, doesn't inherently feel true, and so it's up to stars and well-chosen details to bridge the credibility gap. As longtime sweethearts of matching naivety, a meek Moore and a better-than-usual Carell are able to harmonise their respective brands of vulnerability. Gosling's handsome devil remains a down-to-earth diversion by being uncreepy and goodhearted (and less smug than usual), a bullshitter but a straight shooter.

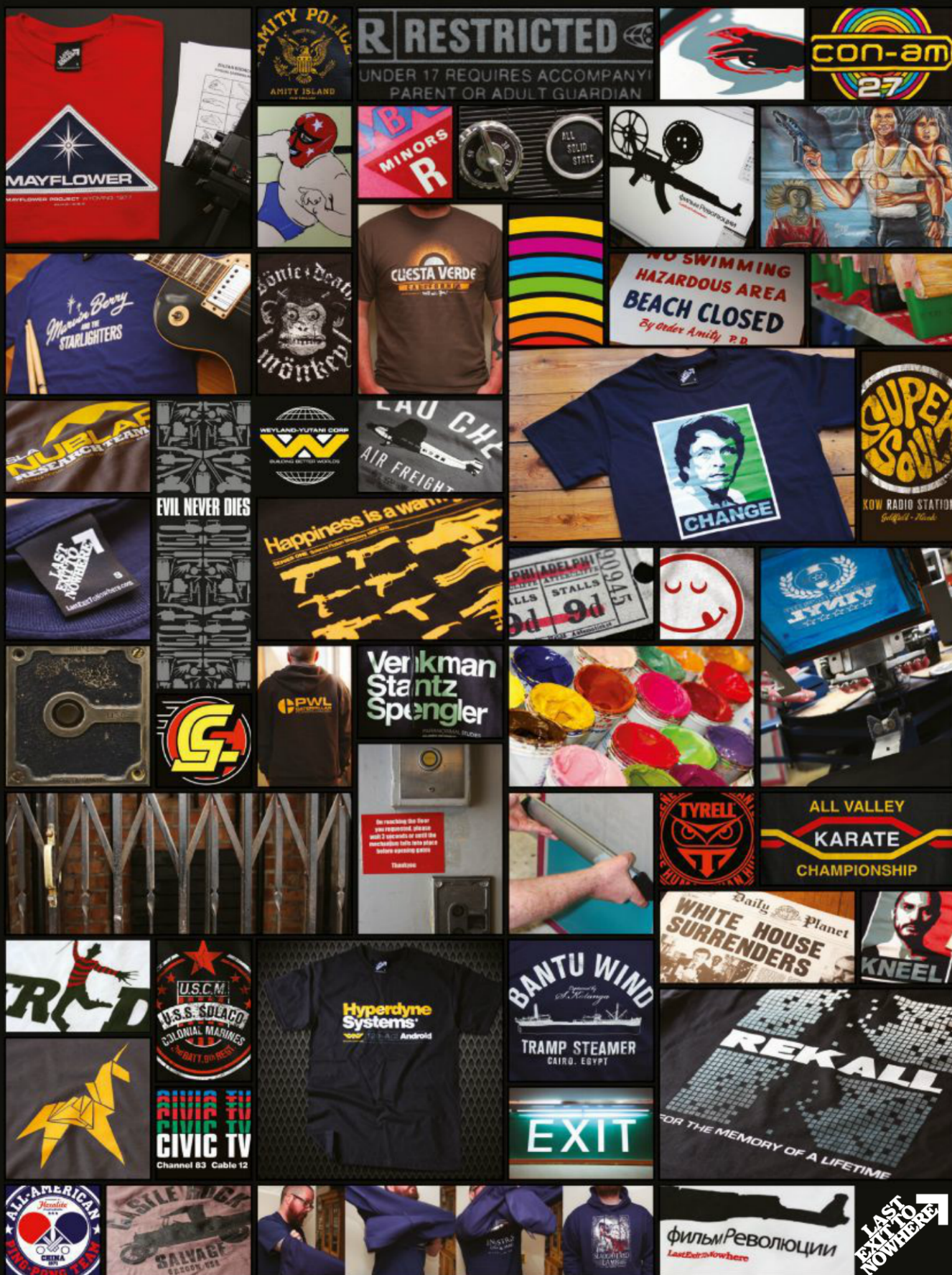
Requa and Ficarra direct Dan Fogelman's interlocking and slightly self-satisfied screenplay with some of the same snap as their previous feature, *I Love You Phillip Morris* (2009), where pacing also kept you from looking too closely. But the thorny pathos of that film and 2003's *Bad Santa* (both written by Requa and Ficarra) is here dulled. Cal's desperation isn't skirted over entirely, but the film's outlet for messiness comes in an arena with lower expectations: the naive, unsavoury teenage passions of Robbie and Jessica, one a putatively wise young soul, the other a gawky bulge-eyed innocent. One would gladly do with less of Jonah Bobo's shuffling smart aleck Robbie and more of Emma Stone.

Fogelman's dialogue does repeatedly pull off a neat, quaint trick: there are multiple conversations in which each side unwittingly talks about a completely different matter. But perhaps that mutual obliviousness, combined with the obligatory, comforting pairing off that wraps up the film, merely illustrate an old saw about love, and Hollywood: nobody knows anything, so why try to explain?

Nicolas Rapold



Mad about you: Steve Carell, Julianne Moore



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## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Steve Carell  
Denise Di Novi  
**Screenplay**  
Dan Fogelman  
**Director of Photography**  
Andrew Dunn  
**Edited by**  
Lee Haxall  
**Production Designer**  
William Arnold  
**Music**  
Christophe Beck  
Nick Urata  
**Sound Mixer**  
Benjamin Patrick  
**Costume Designer**  
Dayna Pink

©Warner Bros.  
Entertainment Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
A Warner Bros. Pictures presentation  
A Carousel production  
A Di Novi Pictures production  
**Executive Producers**  
David A. Siegel  
Vance DeGeneres  
Charlie Hartsock

## CAST

**Steve Carell**  
Cal Weaver  
**Ryan Gosling**  
Jacob Palmer  
**Julianne Moore**  
Emily

**Emma Stone**  
Hannah  
**Anaïde Tipton**  
Jessica  
**Jonah Bobo**  
Robbie  
**Joey King**  
Molly  
**Marisa Tomei**  
Kate  
**Beth Littleford**  
Claire  
**John Carroll Lynch**  
Bernie  
**Kevin Bacon**  
David Lindhagen  
**Liza Lapira**  
Liz

**Dolby Digital/DTS/**  
**SDS**  
**In Colour**  
[ 2.35:1 ]

**Distributor**  
Warner Bros.  
Distributors (UK)

**10,611 ft +0 frames**

# The Debt

**USA/United Kingdom/Hungary/Israel 2010**  
**Director: John Madden**  
**Certificate 15 113m 1s**

John Madden, chiefly celebrated as a purveyor of quality period dramas and for eliciting award-winning work from his actors (his 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love* provided both Gwyneth Paltrow and Judi Dench with Oscars), is not an obvious choice to helm a thriller. But *The Debt*, a psychological genre piece which picks over the fallout from a 1965 Mossad mission whose real truths emerge 30 years on, turns out to be a surprisingly good fit for him. A remake of Israeli director Assaf Bernstein's 2007 thriller *Ha-Hov*, it's as much a relationship drama as an action piece. There's a hint of the crunchy complexity of 1970s thrillers like *The Parallax View* in the recurring themes of guilt, deception and political expediency, but the exigencies of weaving together two timeframes and utilising two casts mean that psychological and emotional depth are suggested rather than fully achieved. The result is a sturdy, often suspenseful piece, but one that delivers less than it promises.

Working from a script by Matthew Vaughn and Jane Goldman, Madden keeps the film's flashback structure intriguing rather than irritating, using healthy slabs of story in a way that doesn't suggest key details are being wilfully withheld. The central section of the film, which recounts the ill-fated mission of three young Mossad agents to kidnap a Nazi surgeon, pulls off the difficult trick of being both tense and full of emotional texture, as rookie agent Rachel enters into a love triangle with bumptious Stephan and the diffident David.

Jessica Chastain, who plays Rachel as a woman pulled taut as a bowstring, is the film's secret weapon, radiating hurt as David dodges a kiss, or barely suppressed fear as Vogel, an infamous concentration-camp doctor now practising as a gynaecologist, examines her intimately. Having a woman as the fulcrum of a thriller is unusual, even nowadays, but here Rachel's dilemmas as both a young and older woman drive the plot, and Chastain and Helen Mirren, furrowed with guilt as the older

Rachel, take full advantage of it. Their narrative prominence means that their male co-stars take a back seat – probably the best place for Sam Worthington's slightly blank David, though it short-changes Ciarán Hinds, seen briefly as David's tortured older self.

Hinds's appearance reminds one, perhaps unhelpfully, that *Munich* (2005), in which he also appeared, similarly combined Mossad-mission genre action with chewy questions of revenge and justice, but managed it rather more adroitly despite working with a real-life story. By comparison *The Debt*'s narrative peaks prematurely at the two-thirds mark, when a key plot point is revealed. Attempting to top this by sending the older Rachel on a final Bourne-style mission is a curious misstep from which the film never recovers. Opting for a punchy if increasingly implausible finale that favours high-octane redemption over realism, it suggests that ultimately *The Debt* chose the wrong payoff.

👉 **Kate Stables**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Matthew Vaughn  
Kris Thykier  
Eduardo Rosoff  
Eitan Evan  
**Screenplay**  
Matthew Vaughn  
Jane Goldman  
Peter Straughan  
Based on the film *Ha-hov* written by Assaf Bernstein, Ido Rosenblum, directed by Assaf Bernstein  
**Director of Photography**  
Ben Davis  
**Editor**  
Alexander Berner  
**Production Designer**  
Jim Clay  
**Music by/Orchestra Conducted by**  
Thomas Newman  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Peter Lindsay  
**Costume Designer**  
Natalie Ward

©Miramax Film Corp.  
**Production Companies**  
Miramax Films presents a MARV Films production  
A film by John Madden  
**Executive Producer**  
Tarquin Pack

## CAST

**Helen Mirren**  
Rachel Singer  
**Sam Worthington**  
young David  
**Jessica Chastain**  
young Rachel  
**Tom Wilkinson**  
Stephan Gold  
**Jesper Christensen**  
Doktor Bernhardt/  
Dieter Vogel  
**Marton Csokas**  
young Stephan  
**Ciarán Hinds**  
David Peretz  
**Romi Aboulafia**  
Sarah Gold  
**Tomer Ben David**  
Sarah's husband  
**Ohev Ben David**  
Sarah's son  
**Jonathan Uziel**  
Mossad agent  
**Elana Kivity Davenport**  
publisher  
**Eli Zohar**  
Stephan's driver  
**Iré Borden**  
seminar moderator

**Dolby Digital/DTS/**  
**SDS**  
**Colour by**  
DeLuxe  
[ 2.35:1 ]

**Distributor**  
Buena Vista  
International (UK)

**10,172 ft +2 frames**

# Drive

**USA 2011**  
**Director: Nicolas Winding Refn**  
**Certificate 18 100m 10s**

The films of Danish-born, New York-raised director Nicolas Winding Refn – from his reputation-making debut *Pusher* (1996) to his brutal, would-be redemptive medieval saga *Valhalla Rising* (2009) – have hitherto attacked the phenomenon of male machismo and male violence with considerable relish and explicitness (though this reviewer would have to see Refn's 2007 Miss Marple TV film to be quite certain). His latest, *Drive*, is a genre film: a more or less conventional Los Angeles-set hot-rod/getaway-driver movie with neo-noir decoration – albeit satisfying enough on its own terms, with well-staged, attention-grabbing chase sequences, a cool-for-cats central performance from Ryan Gosling as mechanic/stuntman/getaway-man Driver, atmospheric cinematography by Newton Thomas Sigel, and a tension-enhancing use of music and sound design (if you can tolerate the rumbles and synth-music). It could be Refn's best film to date, if strangely his most anonymous. Anonymous, that is, if you ignore the film's attitude towards – often latent – male frailty, malevolence or perversion.

In Refn terms, too, the film is old-fashioned and classically derivative. It's adapted by Hossein Amini from a novel by James Sallis, himself a master of neo-noir pulp. The tenor of Gosling's performance and the mastery and self-possession of Driver's characterisation deliberately harp back to the 1960s and 1970s studies in sexy-cool given by such as Ryan O'Neal, Steve McQueen and Paul Newman rather than, thankfully, the recent retreats offered by Vin Diesel and Nicolas Cage. Driver's innocent Marlowe-esque chivalry towards Carey Mulligan's bob-haired neighbour Irene betrays the DNA of the gentle knights of the Raymond Chandler round table, just as his silent, streamlined professionalism suggests the lonely integrity of Jean-Pierre Melville's school of samurais. Likewise, Driver's Ripley-esque synthesis of honour and criminality derives from the clear borrowings from Patricia Highsmith in Sallis's source novel, providing Driver with some sense of discernible motivation, something conspicuously absent in Refn's previous work.

That said, some continuities are also discernible: Refn's essential moral neutrality or inscrutability, say, or his inability, or unwillingness, to escape the bounds of all-male society or to fashion fully sympathetic portrayals of women. You can sense he's trying, with a sequence of coy looks and suggestive glances, to conjure up some atmosphere of heat and attraction as Driver and Irene dally in the apartment or day-trip with her son, mini-Malick-style, in the LA canal marshes. But Mulligan still comes across at best as a plot contrivance, at worst a cipher. Refn does better with Gosling, who – despite his every non-word and struck pose being

**SYNOPSIS** Tel Aviv, 1997. Rachel Singer attends the launch of her daughter's book lauding a famous 1965 Mossad mission in which Rachel killed a notorious Nazi. David, one of her mission partners, commits suicide.

East Berlin, 1965. Rachel, David and Stephan plot to capture and smuggle out Dr Vogel, the former 'Surgeon of Birkenau' now working as a gynaecologist. Rachel is attracted to David but sleeps with Stefan. Posing as a patient, she drugs Vogel but the plan to smuggle him to the West fails. Imprisoned in their flat, Vogel taunts them, and reveals that Rachel is newly pregnant. Vogel picks a fight with David, cuts his ropes with broken china, slashes Rachel's face and gets away. Stefan invents the story that Rachel shot the fleeing Vogel and swears the others to secrecy. Back in Israel, Stephan and Rachel marry, though she loves David.

Flashforward to 1997. Stefan orders Rachel, now his ex-wife, to the Ukraine to kill an elderly psychiatric patient claiming to be Vogel. Rachel tracks the man down but cannot bring herself to kill him. She writes a confession about the 1965 mission for the local journalist waiting to interview him. Leaving, she sees the real Vogel, who recognises her – his senile roommate has appropriated his story. Vogel stabs Rachel but she kills him with a fatal injection.



Freewheeling: Ryan Gosling

hung on by Sigel's camera – avoids seeming effete or overly self-conscious. Best of all are seasoned pros Albert Brooks and Bryan Cranston, who downplay nicely their sense of, respectively, menace and subjection.

All these elements are, naturally, but distractions for hot-wheel movie buffs (if not fans of modern *noir*). So it must be said that the one-time experimental tyro makes a fair fist at the action scenes and applies a Tarantino-

style precision to the mechanics of crime and violence – Driver's clever use of police radio, for instance, or another character's nifty ingenuity in eye-forking an assailant. Tough guys, mean machines, double-dealing, death and destruction: it's a simplistic, nihilistic world, with little room for love or redemption. Sadly, it's also one that seems – to offer mixed praise – to fit Refn's talents like a wheel and leather glove. **Wally Hammond**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Marc Platt  
Adam Siegel  
John Palermo  
Gigi Pritzker  
Michel Litvak  
**Screenplay**  
Hossein Amini  
Based on the book by  
James Sallis  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Newton Thomas Sigel  
**Editor**  
Matthew Newman  
**Production Designer**  
Beth Mickle  
**Music**  
Cliff Martinez  
**Sound Design**  
Lon Bender  
Victor Ray Ennis

**Costume Designer**  
Erin Benach  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Darrin Prescott  
  
©Drive Film Holdings,  
LLC  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
FilmDistrict presents in  
association with Bold  
Films and OddLot  
Entertainment a Marc  
Platt/Motel Movies  
production  
A Nicolas Winding Refn  
film  
Produced in association  
with Newbridge Film  
Capital  
**Executive Producers**  
William Lischak  
Linda McDonough  
David Lancaster

Gary Michael Walters  
Jeffrey Stott

## CAST

Ryan Gosling  
Driver  
Carey Mulligan  
Irene  
Bryan Cranston  
Shannon  
Christina Hendricks  
Blanche  
Ron Perlman  
Nino  
Oscar Isaac  
Standard  
Albert Brooks  
Bernie Rose  
Kaden Leos  
Benicio  
Jeff Wolfe  
tan suit

James Biberi  
Cook  
Russ Tamblyn  
Doc

Dolby Digital  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

Distributor  
Icon Film Distribution

9,015 ft +0 frames

# Elite Squad The Enemy Within

Brazil 2010

Director: José Padilha

Certificate 18 114m 52s

José Padilha's *Elite Squad* was a highly contentious winner of the Golden Bear at the 2008 Berlinale, its aggressively nihilistic depiction of systemic collapse and zero-tolerance policing proving hard to swallow for some. A blunt portrayal of Rio de Janeiro's BOPE (Special Police Operations Battalion), a ruthless special-forces unit engaged in a seemingly never-ending favela drug war, it was certainly provocative – largely thanks to a relentlessly subjective viewpoint (reminiscent of Gaspar Noé's *Seul contre tous*) and Padilha's queasy deployment of adrenaline-soaked action-movie tropes alongside documentary-style, Foucault-quoting polemic. The film also drew accusations of right-wing leanings. But although the brawny aesthetic at times fetishised BOPE, with its lurid skull-and-dagger emblem, it equally made clear that all and sundry connected with it were eventually dehumanised. Yet this follow-up, set ten years later, comes across almost as an apologia, the action procedural of the first film making way for a labyrinthine conspiracy thriller in which BOPE is often sidelined as Padilha's focus locks on to bureaucratic venality and political malfeasance.

Last seen popping anxiety pills and craving early retirement, dour antihero Nascimento (Wagner Moura) is now turning grey and separated from his wife and son. His dense, bilious narration is back too – spewed rants aimed at drug pushers, ineffectual liberals, corrupt cops and the Brazilian bourgeoisie. After a superbly staged prison riot that sees BOPE violently botching a hostage negotiation, Nascimento is vilified in the liberal media by human-rights activist Fraga (played with charismatic gusto by Irandhir Santos). Ironically, the furor leads to Nascimento's promotion to a government intelligence post

where, through the use of wiretaps, he dramatically curbs favela drug trafficking. As a consequence, a new enemy emerges: rogue police militias usurp the cowed dealers, terrorising the favelas with protection rackets which, as Nascimento comes to realise, are covertly endorsed by his own superiors.

On the face of it, this feels like a step up for Padilha and co-writer Bráulio Mantovani – their scope is now panoramic, with echoes of *The Wire* in the film's noxious portrait of institutional malaise. Crooked politicians, unscrupulous media figures and murderous lawmen reign, while Nascimento is gradually remoulded as a righteous crusader more in line with Frank Serpico than the less palatable version of yore. There's (rather dated and obvious) political allegory to spare, as when Rio's governor uses a non-existent cache of weapons to justify BOPE's 'invasion' of a slum – "Operation Iraq," grimaces Nascimento in the aftermath.

Daniel Rezende's surgical editing juggles the teeming narrative with aplomb, but the film can be lazily schematic. Nascimento's ex-wife just happens to be remarried to Fraga, for example – and although the moral tension between hawk and dove is compelling, it's also a convenient device allowing for plot contrivances and forced jeopardy. Furthermore, a climactic *deus ex machina* involving BOPE officers threatens to make a mockery of Padilha and Mantovani's serious pretensions (and reaffirms the dubious notion from *Elite Squad* that BOPE is wholly incorruptible). But if it makes for a less troubling watch than the original, *Elite Squad 2* is nonetheless bold, compulsive and positively oozing with cynicism.

**Matthew Taylor**

## CREDITS

**Producers**  
Marcos Prado  
José Padilha  
**Screenplay**  
Bráulio Mantovani  
José Padilha  
**Story**  
José Padilha  
Rodrigo Pimentel  
Bráulio Mantovani  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Lula Carvalho

**Editor**  
Daniel Rezende  
**Music**  
Pedro Bromberg  
**Sound Designers**  
Alessandro Laroça  
Eduardo Virmond Lima  
Armando Torres Jr  
**Costume Designer**  
Cláudia Kopke

©Zazen Produções  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
Audiovisuais Ltda, Feijão



Hit list: André Ramiro

**SYNOPSIS** Los Angeles, the present. Driver is a mechanic at a stock-car garage owned by his friend Shannon. He takes a phlegmatic approach to the two moonlighting jobs usually arranged for him by Shannon – doing stunts for movies, and as a getaway driver for local robbers. Shannon has ambitions to set up a stock-car racing team utilising Driver's skills; he negotiates for a sizeable loan from financier Rose, at the pizzeria run by Nino (real name Izzy), who is later revealed as a bitter and volatile would-be mafioso.

Driver's casual meetings with his neighbour Irene and her young son lead to a growing attachment to the pair, and a motive for helping when Irene's husband Standard, newly released from jail, is forced to take part in a raid on a pawnshop. The raid goes wrong, and Standard is killed. After being chased by unidentified pursuers, Driver gets away with the bag containing a large amount of cash. Driver correctly guesses that it is drug money.

Driver intercepts one of Izzy's henchmen tailing Irene; to her shock, he violently attacks him. Rose, in a separate incident, also reveals his violent capacities, spearing a fork into the eye of another of Izzy's men. Driver tails Izzy's car, forcing him off the coast road and drowning him in the sea. Realising that the money belongs to Rose, Driver arranges a meeting where the two fight and Rose dies.

Produções  
Cinematograficas Ltda,  
Globo Comunicação e  
Participações S.A.  
a Zazen Produções  
production in co-  
production with Feijão  
Filmes, RioFilme, Globo  
Filmes with the support  
of ANCINE, Polo  
Cinematográfico de  
Paulínia, Telecine  
**Executive Producers**  
Leonardo Edde  
James D'Arcy

## CAST

**Wagner Moura**  
Roberto Nascimento  
**Irandhir Santos**  
Diogo Fraga  
**André Ramiro**  
Matias  
**Milhem Cortaz**  
Fábio  
**Maria Ribeiro**  
Rosane  
**Seu Jorge**  
Beirada  
**Sandro Rocha**  
Rocha

**Tainá Müller**  
Clara  
**André Mattos**  
Fortunato  
**Adriano Garib**  
Congressman Guaracy

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
subtitles

**Distributor**  
Revolver Entertainment

10,338 ft +0 frames

Brazilian theatrical title  
*Tropa de elite 2 - O*  
*inimigo agora é outro*

**SYNOPSIS** Rio de Janeiro, 2007. Lieutenant Colonel Nascimento of special forces unit BOPE (Special Police Operations Battalion) has separated from his wife Rosane and son Rafael. When BOPE's mishandling of a prison riot results in bloodshed, human-rights activist Fraga – to whom Rosane is now married – blames Nascimento in the media. Nascimento is nevertheless promoted to a government intelligence post under aspiring congressman Guaracy, while his second-in-command Matias is demoted to the police force.

Over four years, Nascimento expands BOPE's forces, using wiretaps to crush drug trafficking in the favelas. Fraga becomes a state representative. A corrupt police militia – sponsored by Guaracy, state representative Fortunato and the city's governor – begins terrorising the favelas with protection rackets. To wrest control of the sole remaining favela run by traffickers, Fortunato has the militia steal weapons from a police station, blaming the dealers for the crime. The governor sends in BOPE officers, including the reinstated Matias, who apprehend the dealers but fail to locate the weapons. When Matias becomes suspicious, he is murdered by militia boss Rocha. Sensing a cover-up, Nascimento unofficially wiretaps Fraga, who is working with a journalist to investigate the militia. The journalist finds evidence implicating the governor, but is killed by militiamen during a phone call to Fraga; Rocha destroys the evidence. From the incriminating wiretap, Nascimento is able to foil an assassination attempt on Fraga, but a stray bullet leaves Rafael in a coma.

Fraga chairs an inquest into the militia's activities; Nascimento accuses Fortunato, Guaracy and the governor of complicity. Fortunato is jailed but Fraga fails to indict Guaracy, who joins congress; the governor is re-elected. Police officers kill Rocha. Rafael regains consciousness.

## Fast Romance

United Kingdom 2010  
Director: Carter Ferguson  
Certificate 15 97m 23s

Amiable enough but startlingly amateurish in its execution, this Scottish romcom conspicuously fails to breathe new life into that tired 1990s comedy trope, speed-dating. One wonders – especially when a female character invokes the Spice Girls' 'girl power' slogan – just how long the script had to hang around before the film was made.

The gags are staler still: the fact that a repairman deploys a double entendre about screws just prior to a buxom lady indicating that he can take her "all the way" should give an indication of the standard. Elsewhere, amazingly lame plays on 'buns' and 'I'd like to give you one' lumber on to the screen, trailing their endless end-of-the-pier histories behind them. A character appears to have been named Kenny solely to facilitate a tortured *South Park* reference.

The biggest problem, however, is not the hoary language but the register of the acting. It's not that there aren't decent performers in the cast – several actors here are significantly better than their material – but they have clearly been directed to make every reaction as big as possible, and the effect is oppressive rather than amusing. People invariably overreact to things wildly – no character can say the phrase 'speed-dating' without others repeating it in shrill tones, as if it's a practice akin to necrophilia. If all the laboured, mugging reaction shots were excised, the film would lose about an hour of its screen time.

The film is slightly better when it turns serious. A storyline about shy speed-dater Kenny resisting help with the care of his ailing mother is gently handled and brings out some good work from actors Derek Munn and Alison Peebles (even if they do appear to be rather too close in age to be playing mother and son...). Lorna's crisis over her impending marriage also manages to convince, thanks to a frequently strong turn by Lesley Hart.

Some effort has evidently been put into making the visuals look snappy and slick, though too many shaky zooms prove distracting, and the repetitive score of moaning saxes is a further irritation.

Numerous background references to the work of Bill Forsyth and to Michael Hoffman's *Restless Natives* (1985) point aggressively to the film's aspirations: friendly, feelgood, mainstream Scottish comedy with more sparkle than polish. Forsyth's actors weren't always brilliant either, of course; and pulling together a low-budget film in Scotland is no more straightforward now than it was in his heyday. The makers of *Fast Romance* have obviously put work and passion into making their film happen. But the eccentric charm and spontaneity of *Gregory's Girl* (1981) is conspicuous by its absence. Ultimately, this romance is just too slow. **Hannah McGill**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Amanda Verlaque  
**Screenplay**  
James McCreadie  
Debbie May  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Ross Gerry  
**Editor**  
Derek Aine  
**Sound Design**  
Jack Coghill  
**Costume Designer**  
Sarah Michael

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**Production Company**  
Icklefix presents  
Produced by Icklefix  
Ltd.  
**Executive Producer**  
Carter Ferguson

## CAST

**William Ruane**  
Gordon 'Gordy' Boyd  
**Jo Freer**  
Nadine Catalano  
**Derek Munn**  
Kenny Cairns  
**Michael Howell**  
Elliot Hendry  
**Lynne McKelvey**  
Fiona Benton  
**Lesley Hart**  
Lorna Kerr  
**Lawrence Crawford**  
Andrew 'Spence'  
Spencer  
**Robert Buchanan**  
Andy  
**Vincent Friell**  
Sean Gibson  
**Barbara Rafferty**  
Mrs Livingston

**SYNOPSIS** Glasgow, present day. Nerdy postman Gordon is single and unhappy at work. After finding some misdelivered publicity material for a speed-dating night, he decides to attend, and takes with him his socially awkward boss Kenny. Also attending the speed-dating event is Nadine, who is under pressure from her family to marry, and who has persuaded dowdy Fiona and bride-to-be Lorna to accompany her. Nadine catches Gordon's eye but she favours handsome novelist Elliot. Fiona and Kenny hit it off. Lorna spends a terrible evening talking to inadequate men.

Elliot later goes to Nadine's place of work to return her lost phone and ask her out. Lorna is visited by one of her dates, Spence, who tells her that he's a policeman on the trail of someone from the speed-dating night. We learn that Kenny is a clown who performs for sick children, and that his mother is dying of cancer. Spence visits Lorna, and they grow closer. Nadine and Elliot date; Gordon delivers post in the morning and finds them together. Kenny is suspended from his job for being too lenient, but bonds with Gordon. Kenny's mother dies. Lorna sleeps with Spence, only to discover in the morning that he is not a policeman but a conman. Lorna cancels her wedding. Nadine breaks up with Elliot, and notices Gordon. Fiona asserts herself at work and gets together with a colleague. Lorna and her fiancé reconcile, Spence changes his ways, and Kenny finds love with his mother's nurse.

## Final Destination 5

USA 2011  
Director: Steven Quale  
Certificate 15 91m 41s

The reaper's first clean-up strike is the finest moment in *FD5*, latest instalment in the unavoidable-death franchise. A collegiate gymnast reluctantly goes to her last practice. As she starts into her balance beam routine, we're teased with ominous close-ups: a jittering air-conditioning unit that drops a rusty screw in her path; a flayed, sputtering electrical cord in a slow-spreading puddle of water; a bolt working its way out of the high bars with each revolution. What's it going to be? The sense of dreadful anticipation in the audience, primed for the inevitable by four previous films, is thick. And then – splat! – it happens, jarring despite all our certitude, and most awfully, for there have been dramatic advances in the technology of graphically, seamlessly destroying human bodies on screen since the first film in 2000. A collective gasp goes up in the cinema. A split-second of silence. And then... laughter. She's dead! We're still alive!

This particular communal sick-comic confrontation of death is what redeems the otherwise quite nihilistic *Final Destination* movies, which assemble casts of one-dimensional and mostly reprehensible characters – the only memorable performance here comes from Miles Fisher, and it is memorable principally because of his resemblance to Tom Cruise – and then arrange for them to be creatively destroyed, in build-a-better-mousetrap scenarios, for the delectation of an audience. (Including precognitive catastrophes, this means everyone dies on screen not once but twice.)

The *Final Destination* movies have been known to daunt even iron-stomached horror aficionados. This is because, despite the tincture of fatalistic mumbo-jumbo in the premise – a group of survivors who've seemingly cheated disaster are picked off one by one – the *Destinations* remove death from the realm of the supernatural or even criminal, playing instead on a fear of everyday villains like negligence or entropy. In short, they show the sort of abrupt and ignoble deaths we can easily imagine as ours. The usual *Final Destination* set piece shows a world of objects in conspiracy against humans – an insignificant pea-sized defect that snowballs to fatal force, the proverbial butterfly flapping its wings on the other side of the ocean that results in someone's head being pulped – in three dimensions, no less. The fifth *Destination* offers more of the same, though mostly avoiding the fratty jokiness that marred the last instalment, as when Nick Zano got his entrails slurped out of his rectum in an enactment of Chuck Palahniuk's story 'Guts'. (There is, however, a bit in 5 involving P.J. Byrne at an Asian massage parlour that could've been halved without anything being lost.)

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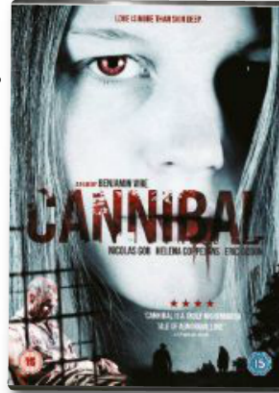


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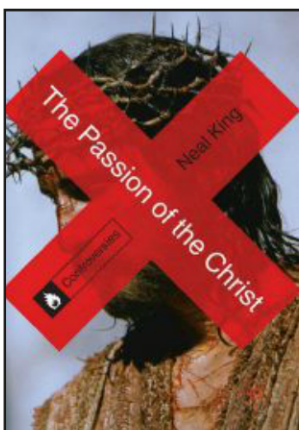
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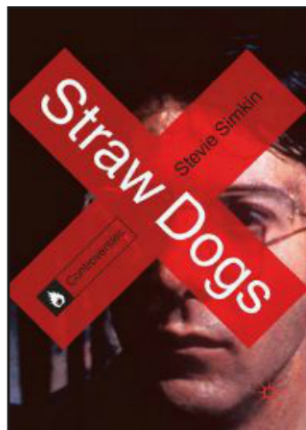
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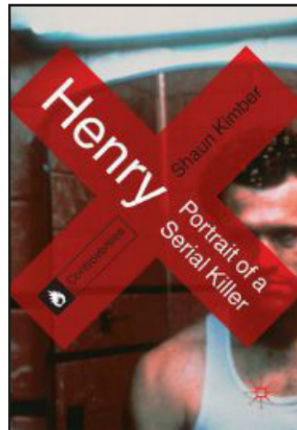
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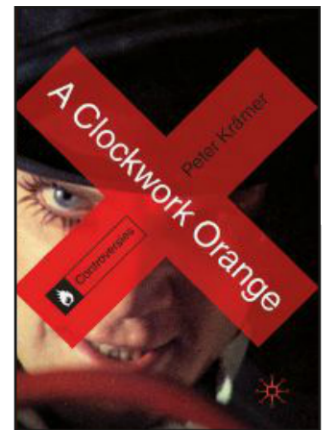
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- Kim Newman, novelist, critic and broadcaster

www.palgrave.com/controversies



Terminas of endearment: Jacqueline MacInnes Wood, Nicholas D'Agosto

➤ The opening disaster here is quite timely, and for many viewers will recall the 2008 Minneapolis bridge collapse, one of the third-world accidents that will certainly accompany the continued rotting of infrastructure in the United States. Director Steven Quale, a newcomer to the franchise, makes terrific use of 3D doing the one thing that 3D is really good for: throwing stuff at the audience. This includes several vertiginous plummets, as well as an opening credits sequence accompanied by showers of blood, broken glass and hazardous objects. May this storied franchise continue for a thousand instalments.

◆ Nick Pinkerton

## CREDITS

### Produced by

Craig Perry

Warren Zide

### Screenplay

Eric Heisserer

Based on characters

created by Jeffrey

Reddick

### Director of

Photography

Brian Pearson

### Editor

Eric Sears

### Production Designer

David R. Sandefur

### Music

Brian Tyler

### Sound Designer

John Title

### Costume Designer

Joni Woodman

### Visual Effects

Prime Focus

Soho VFX

Cosa Visual Effects

### Special Effects Make-up

Lindala Schminken FX

Inc.

### ©New Line

Productions, Inc.

### Production Companies

New Line Cinema

presents a Practical

Pictures/Zide Pictures

production

### Executive Producers

Richard Briner

Walter Hamada

Dave Neustadter

Erik Holmberg

Sheila Hanahan Taylor

## CAST

Nicholas D'Agosto

Sam

Emma Bell

Molly

Miles Fisher

Peter Friedkin

Ellen Wroe

Candice Hooper

Jacqueline MacInnes

Wood

Olivia Castle

P.J. Byrne

Isaac

Arlen Escarpeta

Nathan

David Koehnner

Dennis

Courtney B. Vance

Agent Block

Tony Todd

Bludworth

Brent Stait

Roy

Roman Podhora

John

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Dolby Digital/Datasat

Digital Sound/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

### Distributor

Warner Bros.

Entertainment UK Ltd

8,251 ft +8 frames

# Friends with Benefits

USA 2011

Director: Will Gluck

Certificate 15 109m 17s

O tempora, o mores. Where once romantic comedy recounted the civilising of desire, now it is celebrating commitment-free carnality. Except that it isn't. As a trickle of recent comedies including *Going the Distance*, *Love and Other Drugs* and the execrable *No Strings Attached* attest, today's Hollywood romcom can accommodate endless casual sex – as long as it culminates in the inevitable and sanctifying creation of a couple.

*Friends with Benefits*, a light, frisky and knowing comedy about a sex-without-strings agreement between a recruiter and her art-director client, scoffs openly at romcom conventions from big gestures to manipulative music cues, and makes a stab at pretending to be tough, ironic, somehow different. Heroine Jamie screams that romantic comedies have ruined her life, hero Dylan insists that dating "sucks a bag of dicks", and their frenetic early couplings have the giggling, self-conscious raunchiness that passes for sexual daring in current cinema. Yet by the two-thirds mark, plangent ballads, mopey montages and breaking hearts start to ease us into a box-ticking happy ending.

It's not just that *Friends with Benefits* welches on the deal, substituting sappiness for engaging cynicism. Given that the film's cheerful bargain and fast-talking insouciance about sex reflect

today's booty-call culture in a neat fashion, one feels that the opportunity to rake it over mercilessly has been missed. Even more so since director Will Gluck's equally knowing *Easy A* (2010) wrung rueful laughs from its rather more pointed satire on high-school hook-ups. So why settle here for banalities ("It's not who you want to see Friday night, it's who you want to spend all day Saturday with") even if they're delivered with heavy topspin by Woody Harrelson's man-chasing, macho sports editor? As if to prove his point, the film's stars Justin Timberlake and Mila Kunis are significantly more seductive clothed than unclothed, bickering and teasing their way around New York like a foul-mouthed, frappuccino-swilling homage to 1940s battle-of-the-sexes comedies.

Pleasingly, Kunis is allowed the same dramatic and comic weight as her co-star, and her brusquely gabby, rule-breaking perkiness sets the movie's pace, with Timberlake loping amiably alongside, proving as irritatingly nimble at light comedy as he was portraying charismatic sleaze in *The Social Network* (2010). Light and shade are provided by, respectively, a frothy Patricia Clarkson as Jamie's hilariously dippy-hippie mother ("So my daughter is just your slampiece?") and a dignified Richard Jenkins as Dylan's father, who has that movie-styled Alzheimer's in which the sufferer eschews trousers but dispenses sterling advice at the crucial moment.

Parental failings loom large as the screenwriters labour to show how the fallout from divorce and patchy single-parenting has made Dylan and Jamie commitment-wary. Yet these two also seem to be emotionally frozen in adolescence, big kids despite their big jobs (Dylan gets to choose weighty *GQ* coverlines such as, 'How to Wear White



Bosom buddies: Mila Kunis, Justin Timberlake

Pants to a Cookout') in a manner oddly antithetical to the wannabe Hepburn-and-Tracy snap-and-crackle of their earlier exchanges.

Handily, the viewer gets time to muse on these sociocultural snippets, since the film's plotting is slender, its pace amped up by pointlessly kinetic cutting and dialogue delivered at lightning speed, and Gluck is not a visual stylist. The script, by Keith Merryman and David A. Newman as well as Gluck himself, is reliably funny but spattered with relentless pop-culture and celebrity references that feel like verbal winks rather than real wit. It's a film that's forever waving its sexy, contemporary relevance in your face – there's much play with iPads and touch-screens, and a flashmob finale that looks, ironically, very 2009 – but one still gets the feeling that it will date about as fast as deely-boppers did.

♦♦ **Kate Stables**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Martin Shafer  
Liz Grotzer  
Jerry Zucker  
Janet Zucker  
Will Gluck  
**Screenplay**  
Keith Merryman  
David A. Newman  
Will Gluck  
**Story**  
Harley Peyton  
Keith Merryman  
David A. Newman  
**Director of Photography**  
Michael Grady  
**Edited by**  
Tia Nolan  
**Production Designer**  
Marcia Hinds  
**Production Mixer**  
Geoffrey Patterson  
**Costume Designer**  
Renee Ehrlich Kalfus

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**Production Companies**  
Screen Gems presents  
a Castle Rock  
Entertainment/Zucker/  
Olive Bridge  
Entertainment  
production  
A Will Gluck film  
**Executive Producer**  
Glenn S. Gainer

## CAST

**Justin Timberlake**  
Dylan  
**Mila Kunis**  
Jamie  
**Patricia Clarkson**  
Lorna  
**Jenna Elfman**  
Annie  
**Bryan Greenberg**  
Parker  
**Nolan Gould**  
Sam  
**Richard Jenkins**  
Mr Harper  
**Woody Harrelson**  
Tommy  
**Andy Samberg**  
Quincy  
**Shaun White**  
himself

**Dolby Digital/DTS/**  
**SDDS**  
**In Colour**  
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures Releasing

**8,764 ft +8 frames**

**SYNOPSIS** New York, present day. Recruiter Jamie brings Los Angeles art director Dylan to New York to work for *GQ* magazine, and befriends him. Fed up with bad break-ups, they make a sex-with-no-relationship agreement, which goes well. Jamie decides to date a doctor, who dumps her because she is seeking a Prince Charming. Dylan takes her to visit his family in LA to cheer her up, and they start to fall in love. Overhearing Dylan telling his sister that she is too damaged for a serious relationship, a sad and angry Jamie returns to New York. Dylan's father, an Alzheimer's sufferer, tells him to seize the day. Jamie's hippie mother suggests that she update her fairytale notions about men. Jamie rebuffs Dylan's attempts to make up. Dylan organises a special flashmob at Grand Central Station to give them a movie-style moment together. They make up, and go on their first official date.



Justice is blind: 'The Green Wave'

# The Green Wave

Germany 2010

Director: Ali Samadi Ahadi

As has been amply apparent during the tumult of the Arab Spring, revolutions have modernised. Whether you regard it as democracy in action or just a new way to rent a mob, cries for help and calls to arms can now leap continents at fibre-optic speed. And should you happen to be an oppressive regime, you might be finding it increasingly difficult to keep the world's nose out of your more nefarious business: it's harder to maintain a nicely whitewashed official version of events when your citizens have camera phones and international networks of Facebook friends and Twitter followers. Whether international affront and online campaigns ultimately translate into more effective interventions in trouble zones or more aid reaching the needy is a matter yet to be hammered out – but certainly the in-your-face instantaneousness of modern communication has stripped some of the mystique from far-off conflicts.

Documentaries such as Ali Samadi Ahadi's *The Green Wave* can thrust us directly into the heart of the events they describe – in this case, the unrest triggered by the disputed 2009 Iranian election – with phone footage and blog posts from those who were present at the time. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's regime may have expelled foreign media as Iranians took to the streets to dispute the election result, but it couldn't stop those protesters creating their own coverage and getting it out into the world.

The effect of the onslaught of personal testimony that we see here is somewhat mixed, however. While the information provided is thrillingly and shockingly direct, its origins and authorship can be obscure, providing

the potential for manipulation – or for the damaging suspicion thereof. One wishes – particularly given the recent 'Gay Girl in Damascus' hoax – that the provenance of the blog posts used here had been identified with a little more precision. Have different accounts been commingled? Are some of the bloggers also interviewees, as seems to be the case? Perhaps certain witnesses require protective anonymity, but given the extreme gravity of the situations described – the theft of an election, the beating, murder and false imprisonment of protesters – greater rigour in the telling would have ensured a more cogent argument. The film opts instead for a level of emotion that is in danger of being counterproductive: weepy cello music and increasingly

bloody and dramatic images risk swamping the film's very real arguments in hyperbole. The animation that illustrates the blog posts – which clearly serves to link *The Green Wave* to recent politicised adult animations such as *Persepolis* and *Waltz with Bashir* – is sophisticated and sometimes beautiful, but it creates a certain storybook feel.

In other respects this is an elegant and forceful film. The footage is as powerfully affecting as intended, while the interviews provide intelligent context for the stirring, incendiary blog material. Iran has slipped from the UK news agenda since the events of 2009, but this film is a timely and impassioned reminder of what its people have endured.

♦♦ **Hannah McGill**

## CREDITS

**Producers**  
Oliver Stoltz  
Jan Krüger  
**Written by**  
Ali Samadi Ahadi  
**After an idea by**  
Oliver Stoltz  
Ali Samadi Ahadi  
**Editors**  
Barbara Toennieshen  
Andreas Menin  
**Art Director**  
Ali Soozandeh  
**Composer**  
Ali N. Askin

**Sound**  
Gero Schneider Von  
Marienreu  
Steve Milligan

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GmbH/Wizard UG und  
Co Produktions KG

**Production Companies**  
A Dreamer Joint  
Venture Filmproduktion  
in co-production with  
WIZARD UG  
(haftungsbeschränkt)

und Co Produktions KG  
and ARTE, WDR  
This production is  
funded by Filmstiftung  
Nordrhein-Westfalen,  
Filmförderung Baden-  
Württemberg,  
NordMedia, MEDIA

**[1.85:1]**  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof Pictures

## CAST

**Pegah Ferydoni**  
voice of Azadeh  
**Navid Akhavan**  
voice of Kaveh  
**In Colour**

**SYNOPSIS** A documentary combining interviews and animated images to tell the story of the unrest that attended Iran's disputed 2009 election. A voiceover explains that the animations are based on blog entries posted by Iranian citizens at the time. In the first of these sections, a young man describes his experience of a rally in support of reformist candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi in May 2009. Interviewees then explain how frustration at the increasing social restrictions imposed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's incumbent regime led to a groundswell of support for Mousavi. Crowds mass in town squares to watch TV debates, and on the day of the election the turnout of Mousavi supporters seems high. However, Mousavi is placed under house arrest and foreign press are thrown out of the country. Ahmadinejad claims the election with a reported 69 per cent of the vote. Protesters take to the streets, and the militia respond with increasing violence. Iran's spiritual leader Ali Khamenei condemns the protesters, further inflaming the situation. One blogger describes seeing a young boy being beaten unconscious in the street; another reports how he himself was imprisoned and, along with many other inmates, subjected to abuse. In another blog post, a woman tells of a secret meeting with her cousin, a member of the militia, during which he expressed horror and remorse. Interviewees castigate the international community for failing to act.

## Guilty of Romance

Japan 2011

Director: Sion Sono

Certificate 18 113m 10s

Sono Sion calls this the culmination of his 'trilogy of hate', though for those who've already worked their way through *Love Exposure* (in which the son of a religious maniac seeks desire without shame) and *Cold Fish* (in which a quiet suburbanite's murderous capabilities emerge when a sadistic rival pushes him too far), perhaps 'trilogy of repression' would be closer to the mark. All three films chronicle the mayhem that unfolds when their protagonists must cross accepted social boundaries in order to express who they really are. In the case of *Guilty of Romance*, the main focus is on Izumi, a demure housewife who turns *belle de jour* to unlock her sexual side and thence hopefully consummate her frustrating marriage to a seemingly 'pure' romantic novelist. This transgression is unlikely to be a blissfully uncomplicated matter, however, since it's becoming Sono's signature move to have liberation burn so bright that somebody usually goes down in flames.

*Guilty of Romance* sets itself up as a serial-killer detective tale, in which the grisly discovery of dismembered female body parts arranged with bits of tailor's dummies presents a testing case for female detective Yoshida. In the 144-minute version which screened in the Cannes Directors' Fortnight earlier this year, Mizuno Miki's detective emerged as one of three central female characters, but the scenes delineating her home life and troubled sexuality have been excised for this 112-minute international release, leaving the whole policier element looking rather sketchy. The crux of the story is instead with Izumi, whose odyssey from bone-china plates and embroidered twinsets at home to adult-video shoots and flaunting herself on the streets of Shibuya illustrates the notion that within any prim bourgeois spouse a sex addict may lurk.

This being a co-production with Nikkatsu (home of much 1970s softcore), there's a suspicion that the film's motives are as much salacious



Blame game: Makoto Togashi

as thematic, and actress Kagurazaka Megumi certainly fronts up to the physical demands of the role. Still, the rather dark trajectory of her journey of self-discovery just about convinces us that Sono has something to say about the social stereotyping which divides female roles into wife or whore and thus limits the possibilities for a woman like Izumi, who seeks fulfilment by combining both. There are no role models blazing a trail for her, which is what brings her into the orbit of the other main female character, Togashi Makoto's Mitsuko, who channels her voracious sexuality into a firmly regimented existence – respected literature professor by day, fearless prostitute for sinister pimp Kaoru by night.

While the early part of Izumi's misadventures plays as skittish satire, or even frisky comedy, the more her fortunes entwine with the intense Mitsuko, the more the tone shifts towards tortured melodrama – Togashi's committed performance underlines the tragedy of a woman whose licentiousness is far from a declaration of amoral free will, but rather a role imposed on her by an abusive, degenerate father. The film becomes darker and more imposing as it goes along, with the literary references brought in by Togashi's prof (Kafka's *The Castle*, Tamura Ryuichi's poem

'On My Way Home') and some fascinating music choices (Marin Marais, Mahler) seeking to add a bit of cultural heft to the explicit goings-on.

The ambition is clear but, alas, as with *Cold Fish*, Sono hammers away at the same idea long after we've got it, resulting in a film that seems hectoring and a tad obvious by the close – when the combination of Tamura and Mahler is really beginning to grate. No match for the *sui generis* fresco that is *Love Exposure*, somewhat less controlled than the greater part of *Cold Fish*, this weakest section of Sono's 'hate trilogy' finds the director still with plenty to say about Japanese social and sexual mores but somehow lacking the discipline to put his ideas into effective dramatic focus.

✶ Trevor Johnston

### CREDITS

**Director**  
Sono Sion  
**Producers**  
Chiba Yoshinori  
Izuka Nobuhiro  
**Screenplay**  
Sono Sion  
**Original Idea**  
Kunizane Mizue  
**Director of Photography**  
Tanigawa Sohei  
**Sound Design**  
Ito Masatoshi  
**Wardrobe**  
Hakamata Chiyo

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Film Partners  
**Production Companies**  
Guilty of Romance Film Partners  
Nikkatsu, Django-Film  
a Nikkatsu Studio co-production  
made by Guilty of Romance Film Partners  
**Executive Producers**  
Toba Kenjiro  
Otsuki Toshimichi

### CAST

Kagurazaka Megumi  
Izumi  
Mizuno Miki  
Kazuko  
Togashi Makoto  
Mitsuko  
Tsuda Kanji  
Izumi's husband

Iwamatsu Ryo  
supermarket manager  
Kobayashi Ryuju  
Izumi's sex friend  
Ohkata Hisako  
Mitsuko's mother  
Kobayashi Ryuju  
Kaoru

**DTS**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Eureka Entertainment

10,185 ft +0 frames

Japanese theatrical title  
Koi no tsumi

## The Inbetweeners Movie

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Ben Palmer

Certificate 15 96m 49s

In *The League of Gentlemen's Apocalypse* (2005), a cruelly accurate joke skewers the default spin-off movie from a British TV comedy show in which all the characters go on holiday together and suffer familiar indignities ("the hotel's not built et cetera"). Plainly, the spectres of everything from *Holiday on the Buses* (1973) to *Kevin & Perry Go Large* (2000) hangs over *The Inbetweeners Movie*, though it's worth recalling that *The Likely Lads*, which similarly took a holiday route, is a rare TV spin-off film that serves as a proper, laughter-with-melancholy send-off for characters carefully developed over the series.

At bottom, this is a typical puke-and-poo, sex-obsessed teenage comedy to stand beside 1980s efforts such as *Spring Break* or more modern entries like *Eurotrip*, albeit with British accents and specific references. The plot thread tying together the gags is in fact a direct lift from *Eurotrip*, as the most normal member of the kid group tries to get over a callous girl who's thrown him over (just as the riff about another character's young stepmother comes from *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*). The eccentricity of this spin-off from the well-regarded E4 sitcom by Damon Beesley and Iain Morris is that the viewpoint character is *not* Joe Thomas's hair-gelled, less-obviously-freakish-than-his-friends Simon but Simon Bird's obsessive, defiantly anal geek Will. Laddishness is a given – though the bright performances of the foursome who partner the heroes (Laura Haddock, Tamla Kari, Jessica Knappett, Lydia Rose Bewley) suggest a truly radical spin-off approach would have been to make the movie about *them* and relegate the series' stars to comedy love interest – and the film delivers the full quota of outrageously obnoxious behaviour, commentary and attitude, with a parade of humiliation gags in which the leads are variously stripped naked or made to look grotesque. Sometimes the film falters in staying with a weak joke – like Neil's orange fake tan – when a TV show could have dropped it after an episode and moved on, but most of the crassness is redeemed by the fact that it's still funny.

Almost subliminally salted in are some striking, truthful moments, like the real cause of the friction between lifelong friends Jay and Simon, which has an almost *Stand by Me* charge. Adrift between school and vague notions of using his inheritance to start a business that will keep the group together, Jay is surprised to learn that Simon, like Will, is going to university, and suddenly sees that he'll be left behind. The brilliant, sad element of this is that Jay doesn't take seriously his *other* lifelong friend Neil, who has happily taken a job in a supermarket. In fact, Jay feels more



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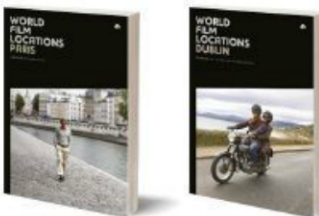
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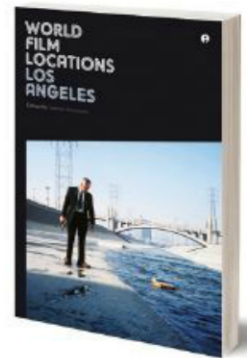
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EDITED BY CHRIS MAGEE

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**Brits abroad:** James Buckley, Blake Harrison, Joe Thomas, Simon Bird

abandoned at being left alone with the lanky goon. Like big but obviously lovely Lisa's flash of real anger at the name-calling – and Jay's cringe-inducing inability or unwillingness to stand up for her – this doesn't last long, or get in the way of jokes about falling asleep on ant-hills or snorting cocaine through a rolled-up £20 note that's been concealed in a teenager's rectum for days, but it's much appreciated.

♦♦ **Kim Newman**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Christopher Young  
**Written by**  
Iain Morris  
Damon Beesley  
**Director of Photography**  
Ben Wheeler  
**Editors**  
William Webb  
Charlie Fawcett  
**Production Designer**  
Dick Lunn  
**Music**  
Mike Skinner

**Production Sound Mixer**  
Bob Newton  
**Costume Designer**  
Rosa Dias

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**Production Companies**  
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a Bwark, Young Films  
production  
a Young Bwark  
production for Film4

**Executive Producers**  
Iain Morris  
Damon Beesley  
Shane Allen  
Caroline Leddy  
**Executive Producer for Bwark**  
Leo Martin

## CAST

**Simon Bird**  
Will MacKenzie  
**James Buckley**  
Jay Cartwright  
**Blake Harrison**  
Neil Sutherland  
**Joe Thomas**  
Simon Cooper  
**Emily Head**  
Carli D'Amato  
**Lydia Rose Bewley**  
Jane  
**Laura Haddock**  
Alison  
**Tamla Kari**  
Lucy  
**Jessica Knappett**  
Lisa  
**Theo Barklem-Biggs**  
Richard  
**Theo James**  
James

**Anthony Head**  
Will's dad  
**Victoria Willing**  
Mrs Cartwright  
**Greg Davies**  
Mr Gilbert

**Dolby Digital**  
In Colour

**Distributor**  
Entertainment Film  
Distributors Ltd

8,713 ft +8 frames

# Jane Eyre

Great Britain/USA 2011

Director: Cary Joji Fukunaga

Certificate PG 120m 31s

A fundamental challenge facing the many film and TV adaptations of *Jane Eyre* is doing justice to Charlotte Brontë's first-person narration. There is a rawness and intensity in Jane's own account of her life that can't help but be muted when her story becomes the stuff of a standard 19th-century costume drama. Cary Fukunaga's new film version, scripted by Moira Buffini, is nuanced and intelligent but lacks the cussed strangeness of the novel. Its point of comparison is not just all the previous *Jane Eyre* movies but arguably also Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), which showed that it was possible to make a movie about a plain 19th-century heroine in a bonnet which still had an undercurrent of erotic tension and emotional violence – an achievement Fukunaga can't quite match.

Fukunaga (whose previous film *Sin nombre* was about Latin immigrants trying to reach the US) is largely faithful to his source material, while Buffini's screenplay introduces flashbacks to avoid the straitjacket of chronology – the film opens dramatically with Jane stumbling across the moors in distress. Mia Wasikowska excels as Jane. The beautiful young actress from Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* has been transformed convincingly into Brontë's plain, Quakerish governess, and conveys effectively her character's mix of yearning, loneliness and defiance. Even as she sits silently in a drawing room full of accomplished strangers, we're always aware that she is thinking about and deconstructing the language and behaviour of the guests. Her scenes with Michael Fassbender's Rochester

have an edge about them: "Your gaze is very direct, Miss Eyre. Do you think me handsome?" he taunts – but she is always ready to respond.

In the early scenes showing Jane's childhood, Fukunaga takes a stylised approach that works well. Sally Hawkins plays Jane's aunt as a grotesque Dickensian figure who relishes treating her ward with cruelty; Simon McBurney's Mr Brocklehurst is likewise a sadistic figure drawn in a caricatured way. And there are some tremendous character turns, not least from Judi Dench in scene-stealing mode as the kindly but fussy Mrs Fairfax.

However, as the relationship between Jane and Rochester deepens, Fukunaga seems uncertain whether he is aiming for psychological realism or full-blown gothic melodrama. The filmmakers probe away at what's driving the characters – the secret that Rochester has been harbouring for so long, the relentless honesty of Jane – but the storytelling doesn't have the emotional charge you'd expect. In spite of the burning houses, women hidden in attics, visitors sustaining unexplained wounds, and the strange howls that reverberate around Thornfield Hall, there are moments when it seems we are watching just another well-mannered BBC costume drama with a fetishistic attention to period detail. There is little sense of sexual attraction between Jane and Rochester. Nor – other than in the early scene in which Jane (played as a child by Amelia Clarkson) is locked in a room and knocks herself out by banging her head on the door – does the film crank up the tension or use horror-movie conventions.

Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre* is a well-crafted film but it also sometimes seems evasive and even bland. "Am I hideous, Jane?" the scarred Rochester with his "cicatrised visage" asks late in the novel. That's not the kind of question the filmmakers here are prepared to ask.

♦♦ **Geoffrey Macnab**



**Woman on the edge:** Mia Wasikowska

**SYNOPSIS** The London suburbs, the present. Long-time friends Will, Jay, Simon and Neil come to the end of their school careers. Will is aggrieved that his father has remarried a girl nearly his own age, Jay inherits some money from his grandfather, Simon is dumped by his girlfriend Carli, and Neil cheerfully works in a supermarket.

They go on holiday together to Malia, Crete, where they are stuck in a seedy apartment and lured into a gruesome nightclub. They meet four girls who obviously like them – Alison, Lucy, Jane and Lisa – but pedantic Will needles Alison over her relationship with an unfaithful Greek waiter, lovelorn Simon irritates Lucy by endlessly talking about Carli (who is also on the island and chasing unpleasant tour arranger James), amiable Neil keeps leaving Jane to get involved with older women, and insecurely macho Jay is repeatedly rude about plus-size Lisa. When he learns that Carli will be on a boat party, Simon becomes obsessed with getting a ticket. Jay buys Simon a ticket but tears it up when they fall out; however, Lucy offers Simon her own ticket, which he accepts. On the boat, Will, Jay and Neil connect with Alison, Lisa and Jane. Carli kisses Simon but only in the hope of making James jealous. Simon decides to swim to shore to be with Lucy, but nearly drowns and has to be rescued. The four friends and their new girlfriends return to Britain.

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Alison Owen  
Paul Tjibits  
**Screenplay**  
Moira Buffini, based on  
the novel by Charlotte  
Brontë  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Adriano Goldman  
**Film Editor**  
Melanie Ann Oliver  
**Production Designer**  
Will Hughes-Jones  
**Music**  
Dario Marianelli  
**Production Sound**  
**Mixer**  
Peter Lindsay  
**Costume Designer**  
Michael O'Connor

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Broadcasting  
Corporation  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
A Focus Features  
presentation in  
association with BBC  
Films of a Ruby Films  
production  
A Focus Features  
release in association  
with Lip Sync  
Productions LLP, Ruby  
Films  
Developed with the  
assistance of BBC Films  
**Executive Producers**  
Christine Langan  
Peter Hampden

## CAST

Mia Wasikowska  
Jane Eyre  
Michael Fassbender  
Rochester  
Jamie Bell  
St John Rivers  
Judi Dench  
Mrs Fairfax  
Su Elliott  
Hannah  
Holliday Grainger  
Diana Rivers  
Tamzin Merchant  
Mary Rivers  
Amelia Clarkson  
young Jane  
Craig Roberts  
John Reed  
Sally Hawkins  
Mrs Reed  
Lizzie Hopley  
Miss Abbot  
Jayne Wisener  
Bessie  
Simon McBurney  
Mr Brocklehurst  
Valentina Cervi  
Imogen Poots  
Blanche Ingram  
Romy Setbon Moore  
Adele Varners

**Dolby Digital**  
**Colour by**  
DeLuxe  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Focus Features  
Universal Pictures UK

10,846 ft +8 frames

# A Lonely Place to Die

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Julian Gilbey

Certificate 15 99m 4s

The Scottish Highlands are the titular lonely resting place of Julian Gilbey's film, which, in its unrelenting first half at least, grips as a lean and nasty survival thriller. Opening with swooping widescreen vistas of the desolate peaks, crisply shot by Ali Asad, it quickly establishes a mood of fraught anxiety as a party of climbers have a near-catastrophic slip-up while scaling a sheer rock face. As this ill-matched quintet – tough heroine Alison (Melissa George), sensible Rob (Alec Newman), insecure couple Alex (Garry Sweeney) and Jenny (Kate Magowan) and obnoxious upstart Ed (Ed Speleers) – attempt some strained badinage in the aftermath, there's a sense of a separate impending threat. In this way it's reminiscent of an above-ground redux of Neil Marshall's *The Descent* (2005), albeit without the nifty backstory gifted to that film's characters.

Gilbey (writing once again with his brother Will, with whom he scripted 2007's *Rise of the Footsoldier*) wastes little time arriving at his plot's catalyst, which does ultimately involve a subterranean horror. Hearing a strange sound during a hike, the group make a shocking discovery – a young Serbian girl held captive in an underground chamber (the initial image of a breathing tube protruding from the floor of a wooded idyll is surreal, inexplicable and disturbing all at once). The perpetrators of this atrocity remain gratifyingly elusive for a stretch; as the climbers are picked off by mysteriously slashed ropes and sniper bullets, the film has echoes of Gonzalo López-Gallego's *King of the Hill* (2007), which similarly kept its backwoods antagonists obfuscated.

Throughout this cat-and-mouse pursuit, Gilbey exploits the harsh terrain creatively. An excruciating descent of a particularly unforgiving cliff face ruthlessly shreds the nerves, Asad's dynamic camerawork making the most of falling boulders and fraying safety cords, while the deafening roar of rapids is enough to thwart Alison's attempts to relay vital information to the survivors gathered on the opposite

side of the water. Shrewd play is made too with the disorienting bluffs of horror movies – a shifty local policeman tragically turns out to be benign rather than the criminally complicit fraud the climbers (and an informed slasher-movie audience) fear.

Unfortunately, when the film forsakes the mountainside for civilisation, it comes undone. Introducing a fresh set of villains, the taut narrative sags, eventually becoming an overwrought scrap between emissaries of a Balkan warlord, Cockney mercenaries, sadistic kidnappers and the remaining climbers. Like Gilbey's previous work (though a big advance on it), this section revels in casual brutality, and the dialogue is often of the facetious variety. Still, a generally strong cast helps spur the flagging momentum. Following turns in *Paradise Lost* (2006) and *Triangle* (2009), Melissa George continues to be a hardy genre specialist, while Sean Harris – memorable as a malevolently bent cop in the *Red Riding* trilogy – adds another convincing grotesque to his CV. After its breathless early scenes, the film's messy unspooling disappoints. But temporarily, *A Lonely Place to Die* is a slick, resourceful and pitiless entertainment.

Matthew Taylor

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Michael Loveday  
**Written by**  
Julian Gilbey  
William Gilbey  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Ali Asad  
**Edited by**  
Julian Gilbey  
William Gilbey  
**Production Designer**  
Matthew Button  
**Music**  
Michael Richard  
Ploymann  
**Sound Recordist**  
Keith Silva  
**Costume Designer**  
Hayley Nebauer  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Jamie Edgell

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Mollinare London a  
Julian Gilbey Film  
**Executive Producers**  
Terry Loveday  
Mark Foligno  
Toby Richards

## CAST

Melissa George  
Alison  
Ed Speleers  
Ed  
Sean Harris  
Mr Kidd  
Kate Magowan  
Jenny  
Alec Newman  
Rob  
Stephen McCole  
Mr Mcrae  
Garry Sweeney  
Alex  
Paul Anderson  
Chris  
Holly Boyd  
Anna  
Eamonn Walker  
Andy  
Karel Roden  
Darko

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Kaleidoscope Home  
Entertainment

8,916 ft +0 frames

# Mademoiselle Chambon

France 2009

Director: Stéphane Brizé

The opening scene of Stéphane Brizé's *Mademoiselle Chambon* takes place during a family picnic. As the camera flits through sun-strewn grass and over the crumpled chambray shirts of the man, woman and child who are nestled within it, a discussion takes place as to the difference between verbs that are direct, transitive and intransitive – a problem raised in the young boy's homework. It's a banal but rather beautiful evocation of this family's intimacy, and one that cunningly introduces the figure who will threaten it: although never named, the woman who has set the boy this task is newly arrived teacher Mademoiselle Chambon.

Véronique Chambon is herself a rather intransitive figure, and also a transient one. Moving from one teaching post to the next on an annual basis, she exists, as her title implies, quite apart from family ties. The film provides no explanation for her isolated, aleatory way of life, though it hints at a strained relationship with her parents, a musical past and a nervous, tightly wound disposition.

By contrast, Jean, the taciturn mason who finds himself drawn to his son's teacher, is a man defined by his relations with others. Having followed his father into the family trade, he still spends his weekends caring for the elderly man, as well as his factory-worker wife and small son. The French town in which he has set down roots is never named but it is clear that Jean has grown up here, married here, and that the thought of leaving has never occurred to him. As he tells a class of local schoolchildren, his trade hinges on the construction of a solid base: "If you do it well it lasts for life."

Playing very much with type as a laconic, working-class hunk with a hangdog look – all blue jeans, faded cotton and rolled-up sleeves – Vincent Lindon reprises a role familiar from, among others, Claire Denis's 2002 film *Vendredi soir* (another two-hander rife with sexual tension and desire). But if there he served as the object of the protagonist's longing, in Brizé's film he stands at the centre of the narrative, which is driven along by the quiet suspense of whether or not he will act on his smouldering feelings for Véronique – a question resolved in a rather disappointing dénouement. Real-life ex-spouses Lindon and Sandrine Kiberlain evoke a very palpable – and rather intriguing – sense of attraction, yet for her part the fine-boned, white-blond Kiberlain (rather heavily-handedly contrasted with Jean's sensuous, brunette wife) remains somewhat wan and one-note as a character. Unlike Jean's, her inner world remains impenetrable. So whereas in Denis's film the female protagonist's effusive fantasies spilled out into the scenery, so that anchovies rearranged

**SYNOPSIS** England, the 19th century. A woman, close to death, arrives at the home of St John Rivers and his sisters Diana and Mary. They take her in and nurse her. She is Jane Eyre. St John resolves to find her a job as a schoolteacher.

The story flashes back to Jane's childhood. Following her parents' death, she grows up in the house of her aunt, Sarah Reed, who treats her cruelly. Later, she is sent to a charity school where she is bullied by sadistic teachers. As a young adult, Jane takes a job as governess to Adele Varners, a French child, at Thornfield Hall and becomes friendly with the housekeeper, Alice Fairfax. On a walk, Jane frightens the horse ridden by Thornfield's owner, Edward Rochester, who is thrown and injured. Rochester and Jane strike up a friendship. Jane rescues him when a fire breaks out in the house. She suspects he is planning to marry Miss Ingram and is surprised when he proposes to her instead. Just as they are about to exchange vows, the wedding is interrupted by two men who claim Rochester is already married. He admits that this is true, explaining that he was tricked into marrying an heiress called Bertha, now mad, who has been kept secretly in Thornfield under the care of a nurse. Jane refuses to stay with Rochester.

The story returns to Jane at the home of the Rivers siblings. She begins work as a teacher. St John wants her to marry him and accompany him abroad as a missionary's wife. She refuses and returns to Thornfield, which has been burned down by Bertha, who killed herself in the process. Jane is reunited with Rochester, who has been blinded in the fire.

**SYNOPSIS** Scotland, the present. Climbers Alison, Rob, Alex, Jenny and Ed gather in the Highlands for a mountaineering holiday. During a woodland hike, the group discover a young Serbian girl, Anna, imprisoned in an underground chamber. Rob and Alison opt to take a shortcut – involving scaling a perilous rock face – to a nearby village to alert the authorities, while the others take Anna via a longer cross-country route. Anna's kidnappers, Mr Kidd and Mr Mcrae, give ruthless pursuit; Rob is killed when his rope is slashed; Jenny is shot. Reunited with the survivors, Alison saves Anna when she is swept away by rapids. Anna's crime-lord father sends his associate Darko to the village with a ransom; Darko instructs two mercenaries, Andy and Chris, to seize the kidnappers and retrieve the money after delivery. Alex is killed after a plan to distract the kidnappers goes awry. Alison and Ed escape with Anna to the village police station, which soon comes under attack from Kidd and Mcrae. Ed and Chris are shot dead, while Alison and Anna flee into the crowd of a street carnival. Darko delivers the ransom to Kidd, who is subsequently overpowered by Andy. Alison kills Mcrae; she and Anna are later rescued from a burning building. Kidd is handed over to Anna's father.



**Brief encounter: Sandrine Kiberlain**

themselves into surreal smiles on the top of a pizza, here we must settle for the literalism of Véronique shifting pastel-pink macaroons into face-shaped patterns on china plates.

Brizé's naturalistic direction and DP Antoine Héberlé's sensuous cinematography paint an intensely detailed portrait of small-town life in all its tedium and safety. But the lack of dialogue – or indeed action – renders the proliferation of long, lingering close-ups wearisome, and the central

romance inconsequential. Unlike, say, Valeska Grisebach's *Longing* (2006), which similarly saw a loving husband torn between two women, Brizé's film never has any sense of tragedy, of the intense pain that infidelity – even if only mental – can inflict on both victim and perpetrator. We never really sense what the lasting implications – if any – of Jean's fall from innocence might be for him or his family, and nor are we led to wonder.

◆ Catherine Wheatley

## CREDITS

### Produced by

Miléna Poylo

Gilles Sacuto

### Screenplay

Stéphane Brizé

Florence Vignon

Based on the novel by

Éric Holder

### Director of

Photography

Antoine Héberlé

### Editor

Anne Klotz

### Art Director

Valérie Saradjian

### Original Music and

Music Adviser

Ange Ghinazzi

### Sound

Frédéric de Ravignani

Hervé Guyader

Thierry Delor

### Costumes

Ann Dunsford

@TS Productions, F

comme Film, ARTE

France Cinéma

### Production

Companies

TS Productions

presents in co-

production with F

comme Film and ARTE

France Cinéma with the

participation of Canal+

and TPS Star in

association with Rezo

Films

With the participation of

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Cinématographie

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In association with Sofica Soficinéma 4 With the support of Procirop and Ango-Agicoo and the development support of MEDIA Programme of the European Union Developed with the support of Soficapital

## CAST

Vincent Lindon

Jean

Sandrine Kiberlain

Véronique Chambon

Aure Atika

Anne Marie

Jean-Marc Thibault

father

Arthur Le Houérou

Jérémy

### Bruno Lochet

Abdallah Moundy

Jean's colleague

Michèle Goddet

headmistress

Anne Houly

funeral director

Geneviève Mnich

voice of Véronique's

mother

### In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

### Distributor

Axiom Films Limited

# Melancholia

Denmark/Sweden/

France/Germany/Italy 2011

Director: Lars von Trier

Certificate 15 135m 30s

Plenty of directors are ego-driven attention-seekers, not always capable of thinking before they speak, so let's put Lars 'Call me Adolf' von Trier's faux pas in Cannes aside and go straight to the heart of the matter. There's only one question that right-thinking paying customers will want answered and it's this one. In the exciting new genre which examines the trivia of dysfunctional human relationships in CGI-cosmic terms, how does *Melancholia* shape up? Well, it's closer to a Roland Emmerich movie than to *The Tree of Life*. Less gay, obviously, than the average Emmerich movie (the only Harvey Fierstein figure here is the prissy wedding planner played by Udo Kier, and he's entirely peripheral), and the twist is that the central character longs for and welcomes the end of the world rather than fighting to avert it. But the climactic cosmic collision delivers real bang for the bucks, and von Trier goes one better than Emmerich by rhyming it with the 'Liebestod' from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. Groovy, huh?

Of course, von Trier isn't really any more interested in the risk of planets colliding than he is in sibling rivalries, the hypocrisies of the advertising industry or the problem of driving a stretch-limo along dirt tracks in the countryside. *Melancholia* is fundamentally a wish-fulfilment fantasy for manic depressives, a grandstanding metaphor for the 'black dog' impulse to consign everyone and everything to hell. The film is divided into two chapters, named respectively after two sisters: the Sadean Justine (née Betty), played by Kirstin Dunst, who combines a very successful career in advertising copywriting with debilitating episodes of depression and near-random episodes of promiscuous sex, and the more grounded Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg), who lives in a countryside mansion with her stupendously rich husband and their adorable son and hasn't a care in the world except for her wayward sister



**Star turn: Gainsbourg, Sutherland**

and the prospect of impending doom. Von Trier has admitted in dozens of interviews that Justine is more or less based on himself, which may explain the character's surface blankness and underlying contradictions. The contrast between the two loving/hating sisters provides the film with the rudiments of a dramatic structure.

Justine's chapter, littered with star cameos, is essentially a riff on Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen* (1998): a family gathering to celebrate Justine's wedding descends into a mayhem of unhealed wounds and angry recriminations. (Thanks to handheld photography we could be back in the heyday of Dogme 95, although the celebrated 'vow of chastity' is blown away by the expensive visual effects.) The looming threat of collision with rogue planet Melancholia lends a background hum of menace to the proceedings, just as Justine's flakiness (she changes her mind about marriage a few hours after her wedding) steadily derails every nuance of social protocol. It's laboriously spelt out that Justine takes after her nihilistic mum Gaby (Charlotte Rampling) while retaining a sentimental attachment to her softie dad Dexter (John Hurt), but nothing is offered to clarify what brought Gaby and Dexter together in the first place. Then again, coherence is not von Trier's forte. The only explanation for Justine's refusal to consummate her marriage, for humping a beardless boy in the garden and for rounding on her employer (Stellan Skarsgård) when he offers her

**SYNOPSIS** *Part One: Justine.* Michael and Justine arrive two hours late for their own wedding reception, taking place in the countryside chateau owned by Justine's sister Claire and her husband John. Despite the best efforts of the wedding planner the event is shambolic, partly because Justine's manic depression asserts itself and partly because of the fractious relationship between John and Gaby, Justine's mother, a cynical divorcee. Best man Jack (Michael's father and Justine's employer) announces that he's promoting Justine in his ad agency, but assigns his nephew Tim to shadow her to catch any killer taglines she utters. Justine refuses to consummate the marriage and instead has sex with Tim in the garden. Justine insults Jack and the agency. Michael leaves. Next morning Justine goes riding with Claire and notices that a bright red 'star' has disappeared from the constellation of Scorpio.

*Part Two: Claire.* Rogue planet Melancholia will approach – and likely collide with – Earth in five days. Justine has suffered a nervous breakdown and is staying with Claire and John. Claire, terrified of impending annihilation, buys suicide pills. Justine begins to regain her composure and views the extinction of life on earth with equanimity. John reassures them and his son Leo that Melancholia will not collide with Earth, but kills himself in the stables when he realises that he is wrong. Extreme weather arrives, and Claire tries to take Leo away from the chateau. Justine, now serene, brings them back. They are sitting, holding hands in a circle, when Melancholia hits.



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some onion soup is that the 'black dog' is suddenly hounding her again.

Claire's chapter, by contrast, is an intimate chamber piece in which four characters react variously to the approach of planet Melancholia. Claire panics and lays in suicide pills. Her husband John (Kiefer Sutherland) rationalises the risk as minimal but lays in extra provisions just in case. Their son Leo struggles to understand the science. And Justine basks nude in the reflected light of Melancholia (yes, she gets an erotic kick from its destructive power – which makes her more of a typically masochistic von Trier heroine than she first appears), pulls herself together emotionally and denounces life on earth as "evil".

In 1989, the late Andi Engel also made a film called *Melancholia*; his was named after a Dürer engraving, contemplated by a former radical whose past has caught up with him. Von Trier invokes everything from Brueghel paintings to the full panoply of Germanic romanticism to validate his 'melancholia', but it's hard to shake the suspicion that what all this is really about is getting the star of *Spider-Man* to squat peeing on a lawn and to fondle her own exposed breasts in close-up. Nothing really changes in Adolf's world: girls just wanna have their pristine star images defiled.

👉 Tony Rayns

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Mette Louise Foldager  
Louise Vesth  
**Written by**  
Lars von Trier  
**Director of Photography**  
Manuel Alberto Claro  
**Editor**  
Molly M. Stensgaard  
**Production Designer**  
Jette Lehmann  
**Sound Designer**  
Kristian Eidnes Andersen

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Entertainments27 ApS,  
Memfis Film  
International AB,  
Zentropa International  
Sweden AB, Slot  
Machine S.a.r.l.,  
Liberator Production  
S.a.r.l., Arte France  
Cinéma, Zentropa  
International Köln  
GmbH

**Production Companies**  
Zentropa presents  
Co-produced by Memfis  
Film International AB,  
Zentropa International  
Sweden AB, Slot  
Machine S.a.r.l./Liberator  
Productions S.a.r.l.,  
Zentropa International  
Köln GmbH

Also co-produced with  
Film i Väst, DR, Arte  
France Cinéma  
With the participation of  
SVT, Canal+, Centre  
National du Cinéma et  
de l'Image Animée,  
CinéCinéma, Potemkine  
Films et agnès b./DVD,  
Nordisk Film Cinema  
Distribution, The I2I  
Preparatory Action of  
the European  
Community  
Developed with the  
support of Media  
With support from  
Danish Film Institute,

Eurimages, Nordisk Film  
& TV Fond, Swedish  
Filminstitute,  
Filmstiftung NRW  
**Executive Producers**  
Peter Aalbæk Jensen  
Peter Garde

## CAST

**Kirsten Dunst**  
Justine  
**Charlotte Gainsbourg**  
Claire  
**Alexander Skarsgård**  
Michael  
**Brady Corbet**  
Tim  
**Cameron Spurr**  
Leo  
**Charlotte Rampling**  
Gaby  
**Jesper Christensen**  
Little Father  
**John Hurt**  
Dexter  
**Stellan Skarsgård**  
Jack  
**Udo Kier**  
wedding planner  
**Kiefer Sutherland**  
John

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Artificial Eye Film  
Company

12,195 ft +0 frames

# Page One Inside The New York Times

USA 2011

Director: Andrew Rossi

Media junkies will love Andrew Rossi's snapshot of a year in the life of the *New York Times*. Not only does it offer several access-all-areas glimpses of what it's like working for one of the world's most venerable newspapers (the gunmetal-and-red interiors of Renzo Piano's New York Times Building make an impressive backdrop), it also devotes much of its running time to exploring the paper's future options as executive editor Bill Keller surveys a media landscape that's changing with terrifying and often bewildering rapidity.

Most immediately, a collapse in advertising revenue has already bankrupted several long-established papers and threatens the survival of many others. Michael Hirschorn's 2009 *Atlantic* piece 'End Times' claimed that the NYT could well be among the casualties, and despite NYT loyalists calling him a horse's ass in return, it's a prospect that casts a long shadow over everything else that the paper does.

The nature of media consumption is also changing, with individual bloggers rivalling established news operations in profile, and sites such as Gawker and Newser ranking stories according to popularity rather than importance. As *The Wire* creator (and former Baltimore reporter) David Simon points out, the Huffington Post doesn't send reporters to unglamorous beats such as zoning boards (municipal planning meetings). Also, as NYT media columnist David Carr highlights in a memorable intervention during a debate goadingly titled 'Good Riddance to the Mainstream Media', much so-called new media still derives most of its content from its older stablemates.

However, the NYT has to move with the times, which it does by hiring blogging wunderkind Brian Stelter as a full-time journalist ("I constantly berate my colleagues who aren't on Twitter"), significantly enlarging its online presence, introducing a payroll (to the outrage of many readers) and expressing considerable interest in the iPad as a possible saviour. The paper also has two dalliances with Julian Assange's WikiLeaks, firstly in connection with a video of Iraqis massacred by US forces and then, in a far more ambitious

collaboration (also involving *Der Spiegel* and *The Guardian*), editing thousands of US diplomatic cables for public consumption. Comparisons are drawn with the Pentagon Papers, one of the NYT's most famous scoops, which took 22 months from initial copying to publication in 1971, an aeon in modern media timescales.

But for all the NYT's increasing use of new media, Carr acts as a reminder that the best reporting will always be based on old-fashioned legwork. In many ways the film's real star, this gravel-voiced former drug addict and single parent has reinvented himself as a tenacious journalist, fiercely loyal to his employer and pugnaciously keen to defend the paper's virtues. While he expresses bluntly phrased concern to camera about declining journalistic and ethical standards enforced by the cost-cutting Tribune Company on its newspapers, he and media desk editor Bruce Headlam make sure that his final piece on the story is scrupulously balanced (and a threatened lawsuit from Tribune underscores why this is important).

*Page One* isn't a hagiography – the recent Judith Miller (inaccurate reporting) and Jayson Blair (fictitious pieces) controversies are both tackled in detail – but it's clear that Rossi is broadly sympathetic to Carr's position. He favours formal interviews over fly-on-the-wall eavesdropping, though the latter is often more revealing, especially a casual discussion about whether the paper can claim the Iraq War is essentially over without waiting for a formal Pentagon announcement that may not come – which ends with the realisation that this in itself is a compelling story. Nearly half a century after coining his most famous dictum, Marshall McLuhan has been increasingly proved correct: the medium often is the message. 👉 Michael Brooke

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Kate Novack  
Andrew Rossi  
**Producers**  
Josh Braun  
David Hand  
Alan Oxman  
Adam Schlesinger  
**Written by**  
Kate Novack  
Andrew Rossi  
**Director of Photography**  
Andrew Rossi  
**Editors**  
Chad Beck  
Christopher Branca  
Sarah Devorkin  
**Original Music**  
Paul Brill

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**Production**

**Companies**  
Magnolia Pictures,  
Participant Media and  
History present  
**Executive Producers**  
Daniel Stern  
Daniel Pine

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof Pictures

# Post Mortem

Chile/Germany/Mexico 2010

Director: Pablo Larraín

Certificate 15 97m 36s

*Post Mortem* is our Film of the Month and is reviewed on page 52.

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Juan de Dios Larraín  
**Written by**  
Pablo Larraín  
Mateo Iribarren  
**Director of Photography**  
Sergio Armstrong  
**Editor**  
Andrea Chignoli  
**Music**  
Alejandro Castañón  
Juan Cristóbal Meza  
**Sound Designer**  
Miguel Hormazabal  
**Costume Designer**  
Muriel Parra

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**Production Companies**  
Hubert Bals Fund, World  
Cinema Fund, Consejo  
Nacional para la Cultura  
y las Artes, Programa  
Ibermedia, Auténtika  
Films, Canana, Funny  
Balloons, Fabula  
**Executive Producers**  
Mariane Hartard  
Andrea Carrasco  
Stuven  
Juan Ignacio Correa

## CAST

**Alfredo Castro**  
Mario Cornejo  
**Antonia Zegers**  
Nancy Puelma  
**Jaime Vadell**  
Dr Castillo

**SYNOPSIS** Santiago, Chile, 1973. Mario Cornejo works in a morgue, typing up reports for coroner Dr Castillo. Visiting the Bim Bam Bum variety theatre, he witnesses a row between dancer Nancy Puelma – his neighbour – and her boss Patricio. Nancy and Mario drive through a socialist demonstration, before she leaves with her militant friend Victor. Mario visits Nancy's house, where a union meeting is being held; later, they sleep together before visiting a Chinese restaurant, where Mario proposes to her. Mario confronts Patricio and gives him his car in exchange for not firing Nancy.

When the Pinochet coup happens, Mario finds Nancy's house burned and ransacked. The morgue fills up with corpses; Castillo's team is now under army command. Castillo performs an autopsy on the body of deposed president Salvador Allende; he reports to the attendant militia that the deceased could have shot himself.

Mario finds Nancy hiding in her shed. He and co-worker Sandra find a survivor among the bodies and smuggle him into hospital; the man later turns up dead, along with a nurse who helped him. Mario finds Nancy and Victor together in her shed; he stacks furniture outside the door, imprisoning her.

# R Hit First, Hit Hardest

Denmark 2009

Directors: Tobias Lindholm, Michael Noer

Certificate: not submitted 96m

Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet*, Daniel Monzón's *Cell 211*, and now Danish documentary filmmakers Michael Noer and Tobias Lindholm's first fiction feature *R: Hit First, Hit Hardest*. All these films deal with life inside prison from the inmates' point of view, enmeshed as they are within volatile and divided social groups – white/Arabic in the case of both *A Prophet* and *R*, inmates/corrupt guards (plus Basque terrorists) in *Cell 211*. In Noer and Lindholm's film, the *R* of the title links protagonist Rune and his Arab kitchen-chores counterpart Rashid, both twentysomething first-timers abused and bullied by the long-term inmates at the forbidding prison to which they've been sent. Fuelled by desperation, Rune outsmarts the inmates by discovering a new method of smuggling drugs to the Arabs, but such ingenuity inevitably incurs a penalty.

With a background in documentaries, Noer and Lindholm's avowed aim was to avoid making just another cliché-ridden prison picture and instead convey a sense of 'the reality behind the walls' – and they have succeeded impressively. Like Audiard with *A Prophet*, Noer and Lindholm use real ex-prisoners and guards in secondary roles, and a real location – the recently closed Horsens prison in Jydall, a granite fortress that they use to outstanding effect. They also cleverly manage to embed within the structure of the film the natural rhythms of a state prison – configured around the so-called lock-system, in which a door must be locked before another one can be opened – to slowly unravel the narrative piece by piece, creating an oppressive cadence that shadows Rune through the endless rooms, stairs and corridors, to gripping, slow-burning effect. The soundtrack too is noteworthy, composed quite literally of walls of deafening noise that suggest the crazed heaving and buzzing of a wasps' nest, increasing the sense of danger and claustrophobic confinement.

There's barely any dialogue, but it's within the film's great, heavy silences that the attention is drawn to dead time and everyday details and nuances, which not only lend a tang of authenticity but, more importantly, enhance the tension and constant paranoia of the inmates' lives. Violence is served cold, without any of the flourishes seen in, say, *Bronson* (2008), but more akin to that in *American History X* (the one very graphically violent act in *R* gives a nod to Tony Kaye's 1998 film). *R*'s bleak mood is summoned in part by Magnus Nordenhof Jønck's stark cinematography, which owes much to the Dardennes' trademark jittery handheld camera – here almost constantly in close on the protagonist,



Inside man: 'R Hit First, Hit Hardest'

capturing the lack of physical space and sense of entrapment; colours have been drained down to virtually black and white, giving everything and everyone an asphyxiated, greyish appearance.

But ultimately it's the raw presence of the two central protagonists that makes *R* so credible. A long way from the 'blessed' status of *A Prophet*'s lead character, Pilou Asbaek (superb) and Dulf Al-Jabouri are far from heroic in their grittily real portrayals of Rune and Rashid respectively. Yet it is the ultimate interchangeability of their characters, regardless of their very different social and cultural

backgrounds – from the initial of their names to their ages and sentences – that gives *R* its poignancy. This connection emerges in a subtle twist two-thirds into the film – beautifully orchestrated through mirrored actions, such as cleansing (Rune's obsession with tidiness proves to be pivotal in the narrative's progression) and shaving – in the course of which they end up on the same losing side; the inevitable victims of the failures, inadequacy and corruption of prison institutions, and of the society that produces them.

♦♦♦ Mar Diestro-Dópido

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Rene Ezra  
Tomas Radoor  
**Written by**  
Tobias Lindholm  
Michael Noer  
**Director of Photography**  
Magnus Nordenhof Jønck  
**Editor**  
Adam Nielsen  
**Sound Design**  
Morten Green  
**Costumes**  
Lotte Stenlev

©Nordisk Film  
Production A/S

**Production Companies**  
Nordisk Film presents in collaboration with New Danish Screen a film by Noer & Lindholm  
Produced by Nordisk Film in collaboration with New Danish Screen  
**Executive Producer**  
Kim Magnusson

## CAST

**Pilou Asbaek**  
Rune, 'R'  
**Dulf Al-Jabouri**  
Rashid  
**Roland Møller**  
Mureren, 'The Mason'

**Jacob Gredsted**  
Carsten  
**Omar Shargawi**  
Bazhir  
**Kim Winther**  
Kim, prison guard  
**Jorg Beutnagel**  
Bjørn, prison guard  
**Lars Jensen**  
Ladby  
**Johnny Nielsen**  
Køkkenchef  
**Claus Saric Pedersen**  
Mimi  
**Sune Nørgaard**  
Sune  
**Claus Poulsen**  
Claus

Dolby Digital

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

Not submitted for theatrical classification  
Video certificate: 18  
Running time: 95m 58s

Danish theatrical title  
**R**

**SYNOPSIS** Denmark, the present. Twentysomething Rune is sentenced to two years in Horsens prison for violent assault. He's put on a ward where almost everyone is bigger and older than him, and serving longer sentences. Having stabbed a friend of one of the inmates, 'the Mason', Rune is forced by him to attack 'the Albanian', one of the Arab prisoners in the ward downstairs. The Mason's boss Carsten and his gang are dealing drugs to the Arabs, but their smuggling operation falls apart. Bullied and forced to clean the toilets, Rune finds a way of smuggling drugs from one floor to another using the sewage pipes; he makes a deal with Carsten to smuggle the drugs in this way. Rashid, a young Arab serving 18 months, acts as the mule carrying the drugs. Rashid is forced by Bazhir, his boss, to explain how he and Rune do it. Bazhir forces Rune to send three times the usual quantity of drugs, but refuses to pay him for it. Rune threatens Bazhir. Rashid tells Rune that the guards took the money and dupes him into a meeting with Bazhir; Rune is attacked by the Mason and the Albanian and killed. Rashid receives a visit from his mother. Feeling guilty, he asks to visit the mosque at night and tells a guard about the smuggling, and that he knows who killed Rune. The next day Rashid is attacked by Bazhir and his men; before the guards stop them, Bazhir throws 'black coffee' – a mixture of boiling oil and sugar – in Rashid's face.

# Red White & Blue

United Kingdom/USA 2010

Director: Simon Rumley

Certificate: not submitted 115m

While Simon Rumley's first three low-budget features *Strong Language* (2000), *The Truth Game* (2001) and *Club Le Monde* (2002) were dialogue-driven comedy dramas that earned comparisons with Eric Rohmer and Richard Linklater, his fourth film marked a radical stylistic departure for the writer/director. Inspired by the recent deaths of his parents, and by his discovery of the filmmaking sensibility of Kim Ki-Duk (*The Isle*), his 2006 feature *The Living and the Dead* presented a family's harrowing, manic descent into tragedy, told more through hallucinatory images and bravura editing than verbal exposition. It found its natural home at genre festivals, even if its particular brand of horror was rooted in finely sketched characters and in the formalist ellipses and symmetries of Rumley's storytelling rather than in the superficial appeal of monstrous bogeymen and special effects.

Rumley's follow-up, *Red White & Blue*, is similarly difficult to categorise, falling somewhere between intense psychodrama, twisted romance and revenger's tragedy. There are certainly traces of rape-revenge, even something like torture porn, in the film's jigsaw-like tripartite texture, but a firm focus on character grounds all the horror in plausibly human psychology. The three lost souls who form the film's bizarre triangle of love, revenge and death are each at a crossroads.

Although bed-hopping drifter Erica (Amanda Fuller) metes out nightly punishments of extreme passive aggression upon Austin's male populace for the sexual abuse she experienced since her earliest years, she yearns for a more stable life. That stability might just come from the softly spoken Nate (Noah Taylor), "honourably" (as he insists) discharged from service in Iraq, who offers her a job and more, even as he must himself decide whether to embrace once again – or put forever behind him – a very dark past. Meanwhile local mamma's boy Franki (Marc Senter) is unsure whether to continue pursuing his path of juvenile fecklessness or to become a responsible adult – until, confronted with the unexpected consequences of a prior indiscretion, he reverts to whining, self-pitying form, only with added psychotic tendencies. All three leads bring a subtle accomplishment to their roles, retaining our sympathies for the many – at times murderous – flaws in their characters.

The title *Red White & Blue* may evoke the narrative's tripartite, colour-coded structure (as well as the allegorical hues of Krzysztof Kieslowski's famous trilogy), but its most obvious reference is to the US flag. Indeed, all the film's torments and brutalities are linked to America's recent history of revenge-driven atrocities abroad through the character of Nate, a one-time military



Seeing red: Noah Taylor

interrogator (and sadist) who, having engaged in a compulsive act of vengeance that can never truly be complete, is heard to declare the resonant (if empty) Bushism "Mission accomplished". For every revenge here (and all three characters are avengers of sorts) seems both misdirected and tragically avoidable, leaving a trail of collateral damage and creating a horrific legacy.

This film reaffirms Rumley as one of Britain's most important and intelligent, if largely overlooked, independent

filmmakers. He directs with remarkable restraint, his verbal and visual economy making viewers active participants in the story's construction. Words here are few, but the use of distanced long shots to isolate the characters, and a disorienting edit which repeatedly disrupts chronological continuities, give full cinematic expression to the three principals' disconnection – while the most unimaginable of depravities are left precisely to the imagination, where they are all the more confronting.

♦♦ Anton Bitel

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Simon Rumley  
Bob Portal  
**Written by**  
Simon Rumley  
**Director of Photography**  
Milton Kam  
**Film Editor**  
Rob Hall  
**Production Designer**  
Josh Crist  
**Original Music Composed by**  
Richard Chester  
**Sound Recordist**  
Martin Pedersen  
**Costume Designer**  
Tessa Justman

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**Production Companies**  
ScreenProjeX presents a Rumleyvision production in association with Fidelity Films and Fantastic Fest  
**Co-executive Producers**  
Doug Abbott  
Adam Goldworm  
Tim League  
Judy Lipsey  
**Film Extracts**  
*Far Out* (2007)  
*Carnival of Souls* (1962)

## CAST

Noah Taylor  
Nate  
Amanda Fuller  
Erica  
Marc Senter  
Franki  
Jon Michael Davis  
Ed  
Nick Ashy Holden  
Alvin  
Patrick Crovo  
Carl  
Mary Mathews  
Marj  
Julian Haddad  
Lil' Allan  
Ernest James  
nightclub pick-up

Jenny Graven  
druggie rock girl  
Mark Hanson  
druggie rock guy  
Chance Hartman  
hotel pick-up

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Trinity Filmed  
Entertainment

Not submitted for theatrical classification  
Video certificate: 18  
Running time: 114m 57s

# Rise of the Planet of the Apes

USA/United Kingdom/  
Australia 2011

Director: Rupert Wyatt

Certificate 12A 104m 45s

*Rise of the Planet of the Apes* risks not showing what audiences would expect, namely a planet ruled by apes. Instead this present-day thriller revolves around one intelligent ape, which eventually manages to make others like him. *Rise* takes its cue not from *Planet of the Apes* (1968, remade by Tim Burton in 2001) but from the follow-ups of the 1970s, which explored how the apes conquered humanity. In *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (1971), intelligent apes from the future land in present-day Los Angeles; before they're killed, a female gives birth, and the infant survives. *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (1972) and *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (1973) showed the offspring, called Caesar, leading his

fellow apes in revolution and bringing about his parents' future history.

Directed by Britain's Rupert Wyatt, the new version retells the Caesar story without the time-travel. His mother is captured in the wild, then given an experimental, brain-boosting drug by scientist Will Rodman (James Franco), who hopes to cure Alzheimer's. When the ape is killed protecting her baby, Rodman raises Caesar in secret and watches as his IQ soars. Enjoyable though these early scenes are (there's an exuberant moment when Rodman takes Caesar to the giant Muir Woods outside San Francisco, the whirling images letting us share the ape's joy in the giddy vertical habitat), they lack the conceptual quirk of the earlier films. The 'scientist raising the quasi-human progeny' plot has been used as recently as *Splice* (2009), though a closer analogy is the BBC/ABC serial *First Born* (1988).

Later, Caesar is incarcerated in a primate shelter, and the story becomes a prison-cum-asylum caper also involving a sage-like orangutan and a warrior gorilla. By now, Caesar himself is wholly recognisable, despite being a CGI creation. His expressions are motion-captured from actor Andy Serkis, who



Project dim: 'Rise of the Planet of the Apes'

**SYNOPSIS** San Francisco, the present. Scientist Will Rodman develops ALZ-112, a gene-therapy drug meant to repair the human brain and cure Alzheimer's disease. His star test-subject is a female ape, Bright Eyes, but she runs amok while Rodman is presenting the drug, and is killed. Rodman learns that she was protecting her newborn baby. Rodman secretly takes the infant home, naming him Caesar.

As Caesar grows up, he shows extraordinary intelligence, having inherited the effects of ALZ-112. Rodman steals drug samples, giving them to his father Charles, who has Alzheimer's. Charles improves dramatically but deteriorates when his antibodies reject the drug. Confused, Charles damages a neighbour's car. When the neighbour attacks Charles, Caesar breaks out and attacks the neighbour, to the shock of onlookers.

Rodman is forced to leave Caesar at a primate sanctuary, where he suffers abuse from the staff and the other apes. Rodman persuades his former boss to restart the ALZ-112 programme, developing the drug in a more aggressive form, though Charles dies. Rodman's assistant is exposed to the augmented drug, and falls ill. Caesar escapes from the sanctuary, steals stocks of ALZ-112 and exposes the other sanctuary apes to it. They too develop enhanced intelligence, with Caesar established as their leader.

The apes break out, fight their way across the Golden Gate Bridge and escape. Meanwhile Rodman's assistant has infected an airline pilot. The disease is deadly to humans (but not apes) and the pilot unwittingly spreads it across the world.

**SYNOPSIS** Austin, Texas, present day. Erica, a damaged survivor of domestic abuse, cruises the local bars by night, offering unprotected sex to all comers. A treasured photograph album, her relationship with a young boy at the local park and the silent phone calls she makes to her estranged mother suggest, however, that Erica longs for a settled family life. She drifts towards Nate, a taciturn Iraq veteran who, despite a sadistic bent, seems genuinely interested in her. He gets her a job at the hardware store where he's working while he decides whether to accept a post with the CIA. Eventually Erica sleeps with him.

For Franki, one of Erica's previous one-night stands, life is looking up: his band has been invited to tour Europe, his mother's cancer is in remission, and he's back together with his ex-girlfriend. Following a regular blood donation for his mother's transfusion, Franki is informed that he is HIV-positive; he realises that Erica is the source. Helped by three friends, Franki abducts Erica; when she shows reluctance to marry him, he keeps her prisoner in his attic. When his mother, also HIV-positive, commits suicide, Franki attacks Erica in a rage and kills her, and turns to his friends to help dispose of the body.

Revealing that he worked as an interrogator in Iraq – and enjoyed his work – Nate tracks down, tortures and murders the four men one by one, reserving the most grotesquely painful demise for Franki. After calling his CIA contact to turn down the offer of further interrogation work, Nate burns a photograph of his and Erica's wedding.

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performed Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* films (2001-03) and the title ape in *King Kong* (2005). It's genuinely startling to see the same human angst suddenly cross Caesar's chimp face, turning him not just into a character but a familiar character actor.

Unfortunately, this is where all credibility is blown, as an imprisoned orangutan starts talking in subtitled Tarzan sign language ("Human no like small ape"). The campiness would be suited to the *Planet of the Apes* stage musical in *The Simpsons*, but it's deflated by dull business with a sadistic guard (Tom Felton), and deflated further by the film's insistence that the guard's killing, when it comes, is an accident on Caesar's part. This is the same kind of softening seen in the remake *King Kong* (the first Kong was a vicious killer); but it's far more deadening in the context of a thriller.

The big twist, as the end credits are rolling, is that the apes bear no responsibility for humanity's fall, which is rather down to the Frankenstein standby of scientists meddling with things they ought to leave alone. As a punchline, this falls woefully short of Charlton Heston's bloodcurdling howl at the end of the first *Apes* film: "You maniacs! You blew it up! God damn you! God damn you all to hell!"

♦♦ **Andrew Osmond**

## CREDITS

### Produced by

Peter Chernin  
Dylan Clark  
Rick Jaffa  
Amanda Silver

### Written by

Rick Jaffa  
Amanda Silver

### Director of

### Photography

Andrew Lesnie

### Editors

Conrad Buff  
Mark Goldblatt

### Production Designer

Claude Paré

### Music

Patrick Doyle

### Sound Designer

Chuck Michael

### Costume Designer

Renée April

### Visual Effects &

### Animation

Weta Digital Ltd.

### Stunt Co-ordinators

Mike Mitchell  
Terry Notary

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Film Corporation and

Dune Entertainment III

LLC (in all territories

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Japan, Korea and Spain)

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Company, Twentieth

Century Fox Film

Corporation and Dune

Entertainment III LLC (in

Brazil, Italy, Japan,

Korea and Spain)

### Production

### Companies

Twentieth Century Fox

presents in association

with Dune

Entertainment a

Chemin Entertainment

production

Produced in association

with Ingenious Media

Made in association

with Big Screen

Productions and

Ingenious Film Partners

With the participation of

the Province of British

Columbia Production

Services Tax Credit

With the assistance of

Hawaii Production Tax

Credits

### Executive Producer

Thomas M. Hammel

### Film Extracts

*The Agony and the*

*Ecstasy* (1965)

*The French Connection*

*II* (1975)

*Francis the Talking Mule*

(1950)

## CAST

**James Franco**

Will Rodman

**Freida Pinto**

Caroline Aranha

**John Lithgow**

Charles Rodman

**Brian Cox**

John Landon

**Tom Felton**

Dodge Landon

**David Oyelowo**

Steven Jacobs

**Andy Serkis**

Caesar, ape

**Tyler Labine**

Robert Franklin

**Jamie Harris**

Rodney

**David Hewlett**

Hunsiker

### Dolby Digital/Datasat

Colour by

DeLuxe

### Prints by

Fuji

2.35:1 [Panavision]

### Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

9,427 ft +8 frames

# Self Made

Great Britain 2010

Director: Gillian Wearing

Certificate 15 87m 50s

An ordinary-looking man in his thirties is walking towards the camera holding a carrier bag. It could be you or me, and the streets he moves through, with their off-licences and corner shops, could be anywhere too – most people living in Britain wouldn't have to go more than a mile to walk streets such as this. Still, something isn't quite right: his expression looks distracted yet also troubled, while the music, an electronic drone punctuated by cries, creates an atmosphere of gathering unease. Suddenly, in the middle of the road, he stops, turns and drops the bag: it's as if something in him has broken, as if he can't take it any more...

It's a powerful opening, but *Self Made* immediately retreats from its intensity. We learn that *Self Made* started with an advertisement placed by Turner Prize-winning artist Gillian Wearing: "Would you like to be in a film? You can play yourself or a fictional character. Call Gillian." Hundreds apply, but only seven make it through to the experiment. This involves being trained by Method expert Sam Rumbelow, in preparation for acting out a 'micro-drama' that will explore the participants' memories and feelings.

Immediately I'm suspicious. Are these really the non-actors they are supposed to be? They seem remarkably unfazed by some of the exercises Rumbelow asks them to do, some of which you'd expect to cause non-performers a degree of embarrassment. I'm suspicious about my feelings of suspicion: isn't this exactly the response that's expected of me? A whole series of questions ensue. What is the boundary between performance and everyday life? Is there any such thing as a non-actor, since all of us are engaged in performing our identities?

We're in that familiar (art) space in which *boundaries* – in this case between 'fiction' and 'documentary' – are blurred. For much of its duration, the film puts us into that mode of listless sub-Brechtian *questioning* which so much art-catalogue language routinely invokes. The mode is deconstructive, demystificatory (or it is their simulation): we see the micro-dramas but only after we've been exposed to all the preparatory work that went into them; and afterwards, there are cutaways showing the crew filming the scenes.

Rumbelow comes across as an intensely irritating and creepy figure – more therapist-guru than acting coach, he's horribly reminiscent of Hal Raglan, the scientist-therapist from David Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979) who encourages his patients to "go all the way through" their emotional traumas, with fatal consequences. Perhaps exploitation is integral to the Method, and perhaps one of the points of *Self Made* is to examine this... And perhaps Sam Rumbelow is playing 'Sam Rumbelow', annoying Method expert...



Madness in Method: Lian Stewart

Wearing has said in the past that she was inspired by Paul Watson's 1974 fly-on-the-wall TV documentary *The Family*, and *Self Made* clearly follows from such works as *Confess All on Video*, *Don't Worry, You Will Be in Disguise*, *Intrigued? Call Gillian* (1994) or *Family History* (2006) in engaging with the problems raised by mediated 'revelation' – the issue here is precisely whether we are dealing with 'revelation' at all, or whether what we are witnessing is an effect of the filming process itself. (The same questions occurred to Jean Baudrillard, and it's no accident that some of his classic essays on simulation focus on the fly-on-the-wall phenomenon.) Wearing's work certainly has less in common with the brashness of 21st-century reality TV than it does with the convergence of drama, psychotherapy and social experiment that came together in the 1970s and continued on into the 1980s. In any case, there's something horribly post-1960s in every bad way about the techniques that Rumbelow uses to 'unlock' the participants' feelings. There's no suggestion that *Self Made* endorses the discourses that inform Rumbelow's practice, and the film's most unsettling scenes – both concerning violence – at least raise

the possibility that untapping and manipulating buried feelings may be catastrophic.

At one point Wearing conspicuously uses montage to highly charged effect, undercutting the sense – the illusion – of unmediated *vérité*. The participant James is re-enacting/ reimagining a scene that took place on a train. He challenges one of the men who bullied him when he was younger and almost immediately appears to be consumed by a tempest of rage. He raises his fist to hit the other (non) actor and for a moment it seems as if he has struck his head with full force. We then realise, with a sense of relief that still doesn't mitigate our horror, that Wearing has cut to James punching a dummy.

The film's climactic scene is even more shocking. This returns us to *Self Made*'s opening shots. By now, we have learned that the man walking the streets is called Ash. This time, however, we see what he has turned around to do. Even though we know it is an illusion – after all, we have seen it being constructed – the image in itself is so sickeningly transgressive that no amount of alienation effects can dissipate its power.

♦♦ **Mark Fisher**

## CREDITS

### Produced by

Lisa Marie Russo

### Script Material by

Gillian Wearing

Leo Butler

### Director of

### Photography

Roger Chapman

### Editors

Daniel Goddard

Luke Dunkley

### Production Designer

Jamie Leonard

### Music

Daniel Pemberton

### Sound Recordists

Malcolm Hirst

Tim Barker

Phil Turner

### Costume Designer

Mel O'Connor

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Self Made Productions

Limited

### Production

### Companies

UK Film Council and

Northern Film & Media

present in association

with Arts Council

England, Channel 4

Britdoc Foundation and

Abandon Normal

Devices a Fly Film

production in

association with Third

Films

A film by Gillian Wearing

Co-financed by

Northern Film & Media

and One North East

Development Agency in

association with Arts

Council England,

Channel 4 Britdoc

Foundation

Supported by Abandon

Normal Devices Festival

With development

support from Film &

Video Umbrella

Made with the support

of the UK Film Council's

Development and New

Cinema Funds

### Executive Producers

Kate Ogborn

Marc Munden

### In Colour/Black and

White

[1.85:1]

### Distributor

Cornerhouse

(Manchester)

7,905 ft +0 frames

# The Smurfs

USA 2011

Director: Raja Gosnell

Certificate U 102m 36s

"Do not be fooled by their cuteness," warns Patrick (Neil Patrick Harris) of the Smurfs in this live-action/animation mix. It's an empty warning: these little blue creatures lack the cute factor that made the similarly themed *Alvin and the Chipmunks* films a hit, if not a critical success.

While actors Harris and Jayma Mays lend warmth to their human characters, the six animated Smurfs who end up in their New York home have limited appeal. Despite strong voice work from gravelly veteran Jonathan Winters (Papa Smurf) and the charmingly childlike Anton Yelchin (Clumsy), these characters are as paper-thin as the Belgian comic strips on which they're based. Admittedly, this big-screen outing tries to distance itself from the original Seven Dwarfs-style character concept, positing that individuals can be more than one thing (Clumsy can also be a hero, and so on). But this notion is consistently undermined: Smurfette (Katy Perry), the lone female, is characterised purely by her desire for a new dress.

Colombian actress Sofia Vergara puts in a seductive turn as Harris's boss, but her plotline about age-defying cosmetics dissolves before any discernible message can be delivered (though an appearance from self-confessed surgery addict Joan Rivers must be intended as an ironic nod). Meanwhile a barely recognisable Hank Azaria puts in an over-the-top turn as panto-wizard Gargamel, a character likely to appeal only to the very young.

The 3D is used effectively in the Smurf village but modern-day New York rarely benefits. Gargamel's faithful

cat is generally portrayed by a live-action animal but frequently given distractingly caricatured CG expressions. The script is highly derivative – like *Alvin's* chipmunks, these creatures create havoc but eventually inspire the work and love life of their struggling media-man host.

Basically it's business as usual for director Raja Gosnell (*Scooby-Doo*, *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*) and his simplistic, unambitious brand of family entertainment.

◆ Anna Smith

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Jordan Kerner  
**Screenplay**  
J. David Stern  
David N. Weiss  
Jay Scherick  
David Ronn  
**Story**  
J. David Stern  
David N. Weiss  
Based on the characters and works of Peyo  
**Director of Photography**  
Phil Méheux  
**Editor**  
Sabrina Plisco  
**Production Designer**  
Bill Boes  
**Music**  
Heitor Pereira  
**Sound Designer**  
Will Files  
**Costume Designer**  
Rita Ryack  
**SPI Senior Animation Supervisor**  
Troy Saliba  
**Special Visual Effects and Animation**  
Sony Pictures  
Imageworks Inc.  
Imageworks India  
**Azrael Visual Effects**  
Tippett Studio  
**Additional Visual Effects and Animation**  
Framestore NY  
**Additional Visual Effects**  
Lola Visual Effects  
Savage Visual Effects

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**Production Companies**  
Columbia Pictures and Sony Pictures  
Animation present  
A Kerner Entertainment Company production  
A film by Raja Gosnell  
Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development  
**Executive Producers**  
Ezra Swerdlow  
Ben Haber  
Paul Neesman

## CAST

**Neil Patrick Harris**  
Patrick Winslow  
**Jayma Mays**  
Grace Winslow  
**Sofia Vergara**  
Odile  
**Tim Gunn**  
Henri  
**Hank Azaria**  
Gargamel

*Smurfs and Azrael voice cast*

**Jonathan Winters**  
Papa  
**Alan Cumming**  
Gutsy  
**Katy Perry**  
Smurfette  
**Fred Armisen**  
Brainy  
**George Lopez**  
Grouchy  
**Anton Yelchin**  
Clumsy  
**Kenan Thompson**  
Greedy

Some screenings presented in 3D  
**Dolby Digital/Datasat Digital Sound/SDDS In Colour [1.85:1]**

**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures Releasing  
**9,234 ft +0 frames**

# Spy Kids All the Time in the World in 4D

USA 2011

Director: Robert Rodriguez

Certificate PG 88m 54s

It's been ten years since Robert Rodriguez's spy kids first arrived on our screens, outsmarting the grown-ups with hi-tech gizmos, pre-teen smarts and a 'Shit...ake mushrooms' catchphrase. Then came a couple of follow-ups and an eight-year hiatus. Now Rodriguez, taking another break from the *Machete/Grindhouse* school of filmmaking, has drafted in some new mini-agents (Rowan Blanchard and Mason Cook) to combat the Timekeeper, a steam-punky villain intent on speeding up time and – of course – destroying the world.

The plot is convoluted and fundamentally incomprehensible (time-travel, big clocks, Armageddon devices and 'chrono-sapphires' in no particular order), the clock-faced villains slightly creepy for very young children, and Jessica Alba in tight black leather presumably somewhat wasted on the demographic. Ricky Gervais voices a robot dog in an adlibbed manner that's either grating or hilarious, depending on whether you're over or under 11. And the film's message – that parents should spend more time with their families – is constantly hammered out.

The new movie's USP is that it's '4D'. What this in fact means is that audiences must now wrangle not only 3D glasses but also a scratch-n-sniff card

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Robert Rodriguez  
Elizabeth Avellan  
**Written by**  
Robert Rodriguez  
**Directors of Photography**  
Roger Rodriguez  
Jimmy Lindsey  
**Editor**  
Dan Zimmerman  
**Music**  
Robert Rodriguez  
Carl Thiel  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Ethan Andrus

**Costume Designer**  
Nina Proctor  
**Visual Effects Supervisor**  
Robert Rodriguez  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Steve Davison

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**Production Companies**  
Dimension Films  
presents a  
Troublemaker Studios  
production of a Robert Rodriguez movie  
**Executive Producers**  
Bob Weinstein  
Harvey Weinstein



Jessica Alba, Rowan Blanchard

to be rubbed at various points in the movie, apparently so that when onscreen characters eat bacon, we can smell... air freshener! The thought occurs that if you don't want viewers calling your movie a stinker, 'Aroma-scope' is perhaps not the way to go. The spy kids have gained an extra dimension but the charm is pretty much gone. ◆ Jane Lamacraft

## CAST

**Jessica Alba**  
Marisa Cortez Wilson  
**Joel McHale**  
Wilbur Wilson  
**Alexa Vega**  
Carmen Cortez  
**Daryl Sabara**  
Juni Cortez  
**Rowan Blanchard**  
Rebecca Wilson  
**Mason Cook**  
Cecil Wilson  
**Ricky Gervais**  
voice of Argonaut  
**Jeremy Piven**  
Danger D'Amo/Tick Tock/TimeKeeper

**Danny Trejo**  
Uncle Machete  
**Belle Solorzano**  
spy baby  
**Genny Solorzano**  
spy baby  
**Elmo**  
Argonaut

**Dolby Digital/DTS In Colour [1.85:1]**

**Distributor**  
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd  
**8,001 ft +0 frames**



Smurfin' USA: 'The Smurfs'

**SYNOPSIS** The Smurfs live in a medieval village hidden from human view. Wizard Gargamel, obsessed with using their 'Smurf essence' in a potion, locates their village. After a chase, Gargamel, his cat and six Smurfs are sucked through a magic portal into modern-day New York. The Smurfs end up in the home of advertising executive Patrick Winslow and his pregnant wife Grace. Patrick struggles to meet the deadline for a cosmetics campaign; meanwhile Grace helps the Smurfs find a stargazer, knowing that a blue moon offers their only hope of returning home. Gargamel sets up a lab in Central Park. The Smurfs find a spell to turn the moon blue. Gargamel kidnaps Papa Smurf. Patrick, Grace and the remaining Smurfs defeat Gargamel with the help of an army of Smurfs who have come through the portal. Gargamel is hit by a bus but later shown alive in New York. All the Smurfs return home through the portal.

**SYNOPSIS** The US, the present. Marissa Cortez-Wilson was formerly a spy for secret agency OSS but retired to care for her new baby and stepchildren Rebecca and Cecil. Her husband Wilbur has no idea about her past and thinks she's an interior decorator. Marissa's relationship with Rebecca is difficult; she tries to make peace by giving Rebecca a treasured necklace. Meanwhile a villain called the Timekeeper is speeding up time, and needs the necklace's ruby-like stone – in fact a 'chrono-sapphire' – to complete his Armageddon Device, which will destroy the world. The Timekeeper's masked henchmen and his sidekick Tick Tock are soon on Rebecca and Cecil's tracks. Using OSS gadgets, the siblings locate the Timekeeper's lair and discover his real identity: he is Marissa's OSS boss Danger D'Amo, and he's trying to travel back in time to the 1930s, when he was accidentally frozen in time by his scientist father. His past attempts have produced copies of himself – his henchmen and Tick Tock. Using the necklace, the Timekeeper successfully returns to the past, meets his father, and returns older and wiser. Rebecca and Cecil – with help from Marissa, Wilbur and former spy kids Carmen and Juni – fight off Tick Tock and the henchmen. The Cortez-Wilson family is happily reconciled.

# 30 Minutes or Less

USA 2011

Director: Ruben Fleischer

Certificate 15 82m 52s

Action comedies often suffer from underachieving action sequences and forced comedy, never fulfilling the potential of their spiritual godfather *Midnight Run* (1988). Likewise disappointing, the follow-up to 2009's *Zombieland* by director Ruben Fleischer stars Jesse Eisenberg as Nick, a pizza-delivery guy in Michigan who is ambushed and outfitted with a bomb vest by two yahoos aiming to use him to rob a bank as part of an inheritance scheme. The almost Larry Cohen-esque premise (apparently inspired by a true story) may appear a sure bet for suspense but, aside from salting the proceedings with some good and nasty jokes, the filmmakers have little to offer in the haphazard, lazy follow-through.

Nick is fitted with the bomb vest soon into the film. From there, the crosscutting covers a couple of main areas: the idiotic delusions of grandeur of Dwayne (Danny McBride), who with Travis (Nick Swardson) is Nick's captor via cell phone – and also the unwitting prey of the rebellious hitman Dwayne has hired to take out his father; and the increasingly cynically deployed friendship between Nick and Chet (charismatic Aziz Ansari), the foul-mouthed pal he talks into helping him despite fresh quarrels.

McBride's tried-and-true character (honed in the TV show *Eastbound & Down* and elsewhere) is the sole reliable laugh-getter as the backwoods king-in-his-own-mind who is a little too candid about his embarrassing deficiencies, though Swardson gives a nicely understated, slightly nerdy take on his sidekick role. Eisenberg abandons the manic underdog flair he's shown before in comedies and unconvincingly takes his character's plight with a quavering seriousness.

The 83-minute movie, co-written by Michael Diliberti and meagrely strung together like a prolonged Funny or Die sketch by Fleischer, rattles along with leaps in logic that are too grating to be entertainingly madcap. A climactic junkyard showdown is



Delivering the dough: Jesse Eisenberg

shot so poorly that one gets the sense of a movie made in a rush, an underachievement to match its villain's dead-ending doofusness.

◆ Nicolas Rapold

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Stuart Cornfeld  
Ben Stiller  
**Written by**  
Michael Diliberti  
**Story by**  
Michael Diliberti  
Matthew Sullivan  
**Director of Photography**  
Jess Hall  
**Edited by**  
Alan Baumgarten  
**Production Designer**  
Maher Ahmad  
**Music**  
Ludwig Göransson  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Scott Harber  
**Costume Designer**  
Christie Wittenborn

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Company LP  
**Production Companies**  
Columbia Pictures  
presents in association  
with Media Rights  
Capital a Red Hour  
production  
**Executive Producers**  
Monica Levinson  
Brian Levy

**Film Extracts**  
*Die Hard* (1989)

## CAST

**Jesse Eisenberg**  
Nick  
**Danny McBride**  
Dwayne  
**Aziz Ansari**  
Chet  
**Nick Swardson**  
Travis  
**Michael Peña**  
Chango  
**Bianca Kajlich**  
Juicy  
**Dilshad Vadsaria**  
Kate  
**Fred Ward**  
The Major

**Dolby Digital/Datasat**  
**Digital Sound/SDDS**  
**In Colour**  
**Prints by**  
DeLuxe  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures Releasing  
**7,458 ft +0 frames**

# 3D Sex and Zen Extreme Ecstasy

Hong Kong 2011

Director: Christopher Sun

Certificate 18 109m 56s

Touted in Hong Kong as the world's first erotic 3D movie (an honour apparently already claimed by the South Korean *Natali*, 2010), *Sex and Zen* has more in common with the work of Russ Meyer than, say, any of the *Emmanuelle* films (except, of course, the one by heretical arthouse director Walerian Borowczyk). But although its tone is initially one of entertaining kitsch – the relatively crude 3D effects are more comic than titillating – ultimately, and alarmingly, the film becomes polluted by elements of misogynistic violence.

*Sex and Zen* is the latest in a sequence of films based on the 1657 novel *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, a kind of Chinese *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Producer Stephen Shiu (Sr) also made a 1991 film based on the same original story, but here he's hired Japanese actor Hayama Hiro to take the central role of arrogant Ming Dynasty scholar Wei Yangsheng, who disappears into a world of orgiastic excess after having a donkey-penis transplant to improve his sex life. This deluded narcissist divorces his wife and surrenders to hedonism only to find himself trapped in a dangerous world of court intrigue in the palace of the degenerate Prince Ning.

One of the characters he comes across there is 'the Elder of Ultimate Bliss' (played by Hong Kong actress Vonnie Lui), a vampiric hermaphrodite of dubious motives who plays a key role in his transformation into a sexual monster and thus sets in motion his downfall. Among her many entertaining tricks is to wrap around her leg a long prosthetic penis – which the director has no qualms in flinging out of the screen at you. Ditto the have-your-eyes-out nipples.

There's an unpleasant rape scene, and a gynaecological torture device involving a spinning steel lotus flower. The eroticism is discussed rather than enacted, which seems a fail by any count, and the film ends with our hero having learnt his lesson, back with his wife, telling the youngsters that sex



Blissfully yours: Vonnice Lui

isn't really very important in the scheme of things. If *Sex and Zen* weren't so riddled with gay-panic moments (women who turn out to be men) and such vertiginous disgust at women, it might very well prove a late-night cult phenomenon. But it is, so it won't.

◆ Roger Clarke

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Stephen Shiu  
Stephen Shiu Jr  
**Screenplay by**  
Stephen Shiu  
Stephen Shiu Jr  
**Story by**  
Li Yu  
**Director of Photography**  
Jimmy Wong  
**Editor**  
Azrael Chung  
**Costume Designer**  
Cindy Cheung

**Production Companies**  
One Dollar Production  
Limited, Local  
Production  
**Executive Producer**  
Stephen Shiu

## CAST

**Hayama Hiro**  
Wei Yangsheng  
**Hara Saori**  
Ruizhu  
**Lan Yan**  
Leni Nam

**Vonnice Lui**  
Elder of Bliss  
**Suo Yukiko**  
Dongmei  
**Irene Chen**  
Pandani  
**Tony Ho**  
Quanliao Shi  
**Wong Shu-Tong**  
the abbot  
**Tenky Tin**  
Lin  
**Naami Hasegawa**  
Tomoko Kinoshita  
**Vienna Lin**  
Justin Cheung

**Distributor**  
Metrodome Distribution  
Ltd.

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
3D

**9,894 ft +0 frames**  
(after cuts of 2m 48s)

Hong Kong theatrical  
title  
**Saam D Yuk poutyun ji**  
giklok bou gaam

**SYNOPSIS** Grand Rapids, Michigan, the present. Delivering pizzas one night, Nick is ambushed by two masked men who attach a bomb vest to him. The men, Dwayne and Travis, intend to force him to rob a bank so that they can use the proceeds to hire a hitman to kill Dwayne's wealthy father. Terrified, Nick enlists the help of his friend Chet. (Nick has a crush on Chet's sister Kate.)

Nick and Chet rob a bank with a fake gun and escape after a car chase. Nick decides to quit his job and tell Kate his true feelings. Meanwhile Dwayne finds himself out of his depth with the hitman he's hired, originally the boyfriend of a stripper he patronised. Nick follows Dwayne's instructions for a rendezvous but finds only the hitman, whom he doesn't know. He and Chet keep the money and fight their way out, leaving the hitman injured and furious.

Travis is uneasy that Dwayne seems intent on killing Nick; the two men kidnap Kate to regain the upper hand. The hitman, who is shot while killing Dwayne's father, wants revenge. Nick and Chet meet Dwayne and Travis in a junkyard and exchange the money for Kate, but a fight erupts and the hitman appears and joins in. Nick, Chet and Kate escape with the cash. Dwayne and Travis drive in pursuit but their car blows up: having managed to unlock the bomb vest, Nick has secretly activated it.

**SYNOPSIS** China, during the Ming Dynasty. Scholar Wei Yangsheng marries the pretty daughter of a Taoist priest, but finds sex with his new wife dispiriting because of premature ejaculation. His desperation to improve his situation takes him to the court of the degenerate Prince Ning, who appoints him art expert. Pulled into a web of court intrigue and sexual adventuring, Yangsheng meets the Elder of Ultimate Bliss, an elderly man who takes the form of a beautiful hermaphrodite. Tired of being laughed at because of his lack of sexual prowess, Yangsheng begs the Elder to help him; in a botched magical-sexual operation, he receives the penis of a donkey. He indulges in a riot of sexual adventure, and divorces his wife. However, the prince is secretly taking revenge on Yangsheng for an overheard slight, and has sent an assassin to shame Yangsheng's wife by sleeping with her. The emperor's troops storm the prince's palace after the mayhem gets out of hand, and Yangsheng is saved.

Yangsheng is reunited with his wife. Many years later, as an elderly couple, they tell a young audience that sex isn't very important in life.

# Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy

Director: Tomas Alfredson  
Certificate 15 127m 21s

Tomas Alfredson's take on *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* runs up against much the same double jeopardy as Julian Jarrold's recent movie version of *Brideshead Revisited*: inevitable, invidious comparisons not only with a classic original novel but with a much admired TV series. If the new film makes a stronger showing than Jarrold's, it's thanks to a crack cast, tight scripting and Alfredson's direction, bringing to it something of the cool control and refusal to sensationalise that made his breakthrough movie *Let the Right One In* so exceptional. Once again he deploys a scrupulously restricted palette, shooting mainly in subdued greys and browns that perfectly fit John le Carré's disenchanted world of espionage and treachery. Even so, memories of the 1979 BBC TV series are unlikely to be expunged.

That seven-part series, scripted by Arthur Hopcraft and directed by John Irvin, ran some 290 minutes. With less than half the running time at their disposal, Alfredson and his screenwriters have kept all the essentials of the original, in which the quietly unassuming George Smiley patiently smokes out a Soviet mole lurking in the British Secret Service, losing only a few incidental scenes and telescoping one or two characters. A couple of overseas venues are changed, but not so it matters. What's preserved, perhaps even enhanced, is the pervasive atmosphere of mistrust and cynical insecurity – a world in which the mole opts for betrayal as “an aesthetic choice as much as a moral one” and Smiley tells his Soviet counterpart Karla that “there's as little worth on your side as there is on mine”.

Given that Alec Guinness's performance as Smiley is reckoned a peak of his career, much of the interest focuses on Gary Oldman's reinterpretation of the role. He's a harder-edged actor than Guinness, with none of his predecessor's knack for emollient self-effacement. (In the novel, le Carré describes Smiley as “by appearance one of London's meek who do not inherit the earth”, which sums up Guinness's portrayal to perfection.) Oldman's Smiley shares the quiet watchfulness, the use of silence to unnervingly elicit the information he's after; but his reading of the character is tougher, more abrasive, now and then allowing his contempt to show through the mask of discreet reticence. Where Guinness's Smiley always seemed internally gnawed by the consciousness of his wife's multiple infidelities, Oldman gives the impression that cuckoldry has simply become part of his prevailing climate – regrettable but not worthy of preoccupation. It's even possible – as it never was with Guinness – to imagine him getting his own back with the occasional fling on the side.

Alfredson skilfully weaves in his



The ringmaster: Gary Oldman

multiple flashbacks, often returning to the same events from revealingly different angles – the shooting of a British agent in Budapest that sparks off the whole intrigue, an office party that gradually takes on ever more ominous undertones. A rare misfire in the imagery – the idea that Control (John Hurt, touchingly frail and irascible) would have set up five chess pieces with photographs of the suspected moles clumsily sticky-taped to them – can be overlooked with a shrug. Where the film loses out, having had to shoehorn

a convoluted plot into a restricted running time, is in the denouement. Since we spend most of the time with Smiley and his chief sidekick, Benedict Cumberbatch's febrile Peter Guillam, none of the potential moles has the scope to establish himself much beyond a bit part; so the final unmasking, to which the whole film should be building, lacks both dramatic and emotional impact, and the ending feels fudged. But as always with le Carré, the quarry matters less than the hunt; and the hunt is gripping. **Philip Kemp**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Tim Bevan  
Eric Fellner  
Robyn Slovo  
**Screenplay**  
Bridget O'Connor  
Peter Straughan  
Based on the novel by  
John le Carré  
**Director of Photography**  
Hoyte van Hoytema  
**Editor**  
Dino Jonsäter  
**Production Designer**  
Maria Djurkovic  
**Music**  
Alberto Iglesias  
**Costume Designer**  
Jacqueline Durran

**Production Companies**  
Focus Features and  
StudioCanal present a  
Karla Films, Paradis  
Films, Kinowelt  
Filmproduktion  
co-production with the  
participation of Canal+  
and CinéCinéma  
A Working Title  
production  
**Executive Producers**  
Debra Hayward  
Liza Chasin  
Olivier Courson  
Ron Halpern  
John le Carré  
Peter Morgan  
Douglas Urbanski

## CAST

**Gary Oldman**  
George Smiley  
**Kathy Burke**  
Connie Sachs  
**Benedict Cumberbatch**  
Peter Guillam  
**David Denick**  
Toby Esterhase  
**Colin Firth**  
Bill Haydon  
**Stephen Graham**  
Jerry Westerby  
**Tom Hardy**  
Ricki Tarr  
**Ciarán Hinds**  
Roy Bland  
**John Hurt**  
Control  
**Toby Jones**  
Percy Alleline

**Svetlana Khodchenkova**  
Irina  
**Simon McBurney**  
Oliver Lacon  
**Mark Strong**  
Jim Prideaux

**In Colour**

**Distributor**  
Optimum Releasing

**11,461 ft +8 frames**

**SYNOPSIS** London, 1973. Control, head of the British Secret Service HQ known as ‘the Circus’, sends senior agent Jim Prideaux to Budapest to meet a supposed dissident. Hungarian and Russian security are waiting for Prideaux and he is gunned down and interrogated. Control resigns along with his right-hand man George Smiley, and soon afterwards dies in hospital. Smiley, now in retirement, is approached by under-secretary Oliver Lacon who confirms what Control had suspected: that there is a Soviet mole in the top echelons of the Circus, believed to be one of four men: Percy Alleline, now heading the Circus, Bill Haydon, Roy Bland or Toby Esterhase. Smiley is charged with rooting out the mole; to assist him he calls in Peter Guillam, head of the Service's strong-arm ‘scalphunters’ unit.

One of Guillam's operatives, Ricki Tarr, makes contact. On a mission to Istanbul Tarr met Soviet trade delegate Irina; they became lovers. Irina told Tarr she knew the identity of the London mole and would reveal it to Control, but was then spirited away by the Russians. Tarr, suspected of being a double agent, went on the run. Smiley sends Guillam to purloin crucial documents from the Circus, while he visits ex-colleagues Connie Sachs, former head of personnel, and Jerry Westerby, who was duty officer on the night Prideaux was shot. He also tracks down the crippled Prideaux, secretly repatriated by his old friend Bill Haydon and now teaching at a Devon school.

Under Alleline, the Circus is preoccupied with Operation Witchcraft, which is supposedly extracting vital Soviet information via London-based cultural attaché Polyakov. Smiley realises that the crucial information is travelling the other way, fed to Polyakov by the mole. He and Guillam pressure Esterhase into revealing the address of the safe house where the transactions take place. Tarr travels to Paris and sends a coded message to flush out the mole, while Smiley and his team bug the safe house. The mole, caught in conversation with Polyakov, proves to be Bill Haydon. Held for interrogation at an army camp, Haydon is shot dead by Prideaux. Smiley takes over as head of the Circus.

# Tomboy

France 2011  
Director: Céline Sciamma  
Certificate U 82m 1s

A tale of a little boy digging himself ever deeper into trouble with his fibs; an exuberant, effervescent and elegiac evocation of that moment in late childhood before the hormones kick in, when our selves are not yet defined and our futures are vast open spaces: there are clear echoes of *The 400 Blows* (1959) in Céline Sciamma's follow-up to 2007's *Water Lilies*. In this case, however, our hero turns out to be a heroine.

There's less to *Tomboy*'s sexual politics than academics interested in gender studies will undoubtedly make of it. Just as *Water Lilies*, which featured a tentative romance between two girls, was less interested in the development of gay identity than in the dynamics of teenage relationships more generally, so *Tomboy* isn't strictly concerned with transgender in the way that, say, Alain Berliner's *Ma vie en rose* (1997) was. Rather, the cross-dressing conceit serves to underline the transition from childhood to adulthood faced by ten-year-old tomboy Laure. When she introduces herself to the other children living in her suburban apartment block as Michaël, she opens the door to a glorious summer spent playing football, wrestling with pals and sharing chaste kisses with neighbour Lisa.

Laure knows that telling the other children she's a boy is a deception, and one that must be rehearsed: she checks her appearance in the bathroom mirror for any budding evidence of her femininity, practises spitting in the sink, and ingeniously fashions herself a Play-Doh penis to pad out her swimming trunks. However, to her six-year-old sister Jeanne – a girly girl who at various points assumes the persona of artist, ballerina, hairdresser and 35-year-old star ‘Jacqueline’ – the game makes perfect, illogical sense. Jeanne plays along, chunnering away about her ‘big brother’, embracing her playmate and protector in all her possible forms. But even she is canny enough not to mention to mum and dad what's going on: they may fondly indulge Laure's tomboyish ways at home, but with the new school term approaching, the time is coming to put away childish things.

The central sibling relationship is warm and wonderful, the performances astounding in their naturalism. As Michaël/Laure, Zoé Héran – Seberg-cropped, sweat-dappled, wiry and awkward – is utterly convincing. The camera hovers around her, taking in the world from a child's perspective, adult voices fading out as the soundtrack picks up distant sounds. *Tomboy* is also a very tactile film, and watching it we share with Laure the prickly sensation of grass under feet, the delightful shock of cold water on hot skin.

Sciamma has a clear gift for working with children, and makes beautiful use of Laure's apartment block and the woods where the children play. Nonetheless her tendency to bathe these settings in a dreamy, dappled light

seems a little hackneyed, casting the film in a haze of 1970s-style nostalgia. More problematic is her insistence on offering us anatomical proof of Hérán/Laure's gender, which seems to echo the grim demands of the neighbourhood children at the film's conclusion. And at only 85 minutes, the film itself is somewhat undeveloped.

As a feature filmmaker, it seems that Sciamma, like her characters, still has a little growing to do. Hopefully it won't come at the cost of her ability to capture the world through innocent eyes. **Catherine Wheatley**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Bénédictine Couvreur  
**Written by**  
Céline Sciamma  
**Photography**  
Crystel Fournier  
**Editor**  
Julien Lacheray  
**Art Director**  
Thomas Grézaud  
**Sound Recordist**  
Benjamin Laurent

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**Production Companies**  
a Hold Up Films & Productions production in co-production with Lilies Films and Arte France Cinéma with the participation of Canal + and ARTE France with the support of Région Île de France in partnership with CNC in association with Arte/Cofinova 6 and Films Distribution Distribution Pyramide

## CAST

**Zoé Hérán**  
Laure, 'Mickaël'  
**Malonn Lévana**  
Jeanne  
**Jeanne Disson**  
Lisa  
**Sophie Cattani**  
mother  
**Mathieu Demy**  
father  
**Rayan Boubekri**  
Rayan  
**Yohan Vero**  
Vince  
**Noah Vero**  
Noah  
**Cheyenne Lainé**  
Cheyenne  
**Christel Baras**  
Lisa's mother  
**Valérie Roucher**  
Rayan's mother

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Peccadillo Pictures Ltd

7,381 ft +8 frames

## SYNOPSIS

France, the present. During the summer holidays, ten-year-old Mickaël moves to a suburb east of Paris with his parents and six-year-old sister Jeanne. He introduces himself to neighbour Lisa, who invites him to play with the other local children. When he returns home that evening, we learn that 'Mickaël' is in fact a girl named Laure.

Laure's mother is delighted to hear that she has finally made a female friend. Outside the apartment, however, Laure keeps up the pretence: playing football shirtless and fashioning a penis from modelling clay to put down her shorts when swimming. Her friendship with Lisa develops into a kind of romance after Lisa kisses her.

When Lisa calls for Mickaël, Jeanne agrees to go along with the deception provided that Laure allows her to play with her new friends. But when one of the older boys pushes Jeanne over, Mickaël beats him up, leading the boy's mother to pay a call on Mickaël's mother. Laure's mother is stricken by her daughter's lies, and the next morning forces Laure into a dress before hauling her round first to her victim's house, then to Lisa's, to confess her deception. Later, in the woods, the local children coerce Lisa into pulling down Mickaël's shorts, proving that he is really a girl. They leave Laure weeping in the woods.

Two weeks later, with the new term about to start, Laure approaches Lisa, reintroducing herself as Laure.

# Troll Hunter

Norway 2010

Director: André Øvredal

Certificate 15 103m 27s

When supernatural horror *The Blair Witch Project* came out in 1999, its *cinéma vérité* style and novel internet marketing campaign portraying it as real found footage was a highly successful audience fear-heightener. André Øvredal's *Troll Hunter* is a clear descendant of that film, an intertitle at the start declaring it to be a found, authenticated rough-cut version of a documentary. But while the shaky handheld style it adopts has by now become overmilked and gimmicky, the Norwegian director's take on the genre is tongue-in-cheek, cleverly playing for laughs over scares, with the quirky appeal of dry Nordic wit.

Like *Blair Witch*, *Troll Hunter* sees students investigating a local myth in the woods, filming their endeavour as they go – in this case, following a man who hunts trolls. Gruff and initially reluctant to talk, the bearded Hans (a wonderfully wry Otto Jespersen) cuts an outlaw-style loner figure, in dark leather coat and oilskin hat. Since he lives by himself in a campervan filled with putrid-smelling gunk and disappears off at night, it doesn't take the film crew long to realise that something distinctly bizarre is up – especially when they spot absurdly huge claw-marks down the sides of his SUV. The film doesn't withhold suspense for long, as the beleaguered Hans soon admits that he works secretly for the government to dispense with any trolls that break out of their territory – using light to make them explode or turn to stone. The beleaguered hunter agrees to cooperate with the students in the hope that publicity will improve his working conditions, saying: "There's nothing heroic about what I do; it's dirty work."

The absurd melding of old-world legend and modern welfare-state concepts about human rights and working conditions is the crux of the film's wit. A whole fairytale lore is set out surrounding trolls, which come in various breeds with Tolkien-esque names such as Ringlefinch and Tosserlad, and the film does well without a big budget to lend these huge, lumbering creatures impact. Rather than terror, the students' main reaction on first encountering trolls first-hand is utter joy to find that they're real – a kind of nostalgic confirmation of folklore in an era in which the aura of magic has been lost. But it's a joy that can only partially hold up – residents of an age of science, these trolls just "eat, shit and mate", Hans is at pains to point out. The anachronistic nature of their existence in a globalised, contemporary terrain is humorously underscored by the perplexity caused by the appearance of a Muslim camerawoman: the crew are unsure whether her beliefs will be detected by the trolls, who can smell Christian blood.

Hans's mention of a government-endorsed mass extermination of trolls, with its echoes of state-sponsored



Norway out: 'Troll Hunter'

ethnic cleansing, touches on a more sinister sphere of reference, though this isn't really developed. In fact, what all this wry satire is in aid of is never quite clear. This is in contrast to mockumentaries such as *Borat* (2006), which duped people into believing in its outlandishly backward Kazakh protagonist in order to expose prejudice, or Peter Jackson's *Forgotten Silver* (1995),

which fooled many New Zealanders into believing in a hoax cinematic innovator's grandiose inventions to underscore the young nation's desperate hunger for cultural icons of its own. Without any clear line of sociocultural comment, *Troll Hunter* seems to seem all too much like a one-note joke – albeit a diverting one.

**Carmen Gray**

## CREDITS

**Directed by**  
André Øvredal  
**Produced by**  
John M. Jacobsen  
Sveinung Golimo  
**Written by**  
André Øvredal  
**Director of Photography**  
Hallvard Bræin  
**Edited by**  
Per Erik Eriksen  
**Production Designer**  
Martin Gant  
**Sound Design**  
Baard Haugen  
Ingebreten  
**VFX and Post-producer**

Marcus Brodersen  
**VFX Supervisor**  
Øystein Larsen  
**Creature Design/ Creature Concepts**  
Håvard S. Johansen  
Ivar Rødringen  
Rune Spaans

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**Production Companies**  
A production from Filmkameratene AS in co-operation with Filmfondet Fuzz and SF Norge AS with support from Norsk Filminstitutt and Sogn og Fjordane fylkeskommune

## CAST

**Otto Jespersen**  
Hans  
**Glenn Erland Tosterud**  
Thomas  
**Johanna Mørck**  
Johanna  
**Tomas Alf Larsen**  
Kalle  
**Urmila Berg-Domaas**  
Malica  
**Hans Morten Hansen**  
Finn Haugen  
**Robert Stoltenberg**  
Polish bear hunter  
**Knut Nærum**  
plant manager  
**Eirik Bech**  
campsite owner

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Momentum Pictures

9,310 ft +8 frames

**SYNOPSIS** Norway, present day. An intertitle declares the film to be a found rough-cut version of a documentary, which has been analysed and deemed to be authentic.

College students go to the woods to film their investigation into what at first seems to be a mysterious case of bear-poaching. They follow a purported poacher, Hans, who is initially hostile towards them. After an encounter with a huge creature in the forest, the hunter admits that he's employed by the government as part of a secret service to eradicate trolls, which sometimes escape from their territory and endanger humans. Hans agrees to take the students with him on his dangerous missions as long as they obey his instructions, such as covering themselves with troll stench to disguise their odour. Hans makes them promise that they aren't believers, as trolls can smell the blood of Christians. He bemoans being overworked, and hopes the students' film will publicise his plight and help him gain better employment conditions. Accompanying Hans, the students narrowly escape different types of trolls, watching him use light to destroy them – making them either explode or turn to stone. Government forces, evidently concerned that their secret has got out, appear to apprehend the students. The film abruptly ends.

# Turnout

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Lee Sales

About a desperate race for drug-money in East London, director Lee Sales's debut feature *Turnout* can on one level easily be dismissed as a dime-a-dozen crime caper posturing for gritty street cred in the vein of Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels* (1998), though the film's release in the aftermath of the August riots adds interest, since it portrays a city that's consumerism-obsessed.

*Turnout* traces the break-up of George and Sophie, a young couple living in Hoxton – a district closely associated with gentrification's soul-sucking onslaught. Sophie has an office job; George, in Fred Perry shirt and Reeboks, makes cash from smalltime drug-dealing. In stark contrast to *Sex and the City*, in which extravagant lifestyles seem to be effortlessly funded out of thin air, the disintegration of the couple's relationship turns on their struggle to pay for a planned holiday, as George sneaks Sophie's savings to fund a drug deal and then has trouble getting the money back from friends who feel entitled to freebies.

Originally planned as a 20-minute short, the film sometimes feels repetitive – as in the scenes when George is reluctantly roped into staying out while Sophie sulks. Though it's suggested that he's the one who's made a grave mistake in losing her, she's shown to be more superficially consumption-driven than him, having entrusted her savings to him for safekeeping because she's a 'shopaholic'. The image-driven nature of London's culture is underscored when George's friend picks up some girls in a club with the promise of coke, and lies that he works in the City to impress them; the point is over-laboured by the time he's on his mobile in a luxury townhouse, bragging: "I'm in a Jacuzzi bruv. A real

Jacuzzi!" But although set up as a morality tale, the film schizophrenically fetishises the flagrant consumption it seeks to condemn, as when George is making cocaine into wraps for sale, and close-up shots linger over the drug.

*Turnout's* title suggests consequences, but there's never any sense that the characters learn much. Tellingly, the final scene rests on a monetary exchange – pounds standing in for emotional terrain that's disconcertingly absent. The message seems to be that materialism is okay so long as it's financed by honest work – a taxi-driver who advises George to get a proper job admits to working ten- to 12-hour nights, emphasising the hard slog of London life. The most unintentionally unsettling scene sees an argument loom when George shows insufficient interest in a pair of shorts Sophie's bought him, finally placating her by trying them on. It's impossible not to recall reports of August's rioters trying on items before looting them – and to wonder whether their mindset may be less alien to London culture as a whole than we'd like to think.

◆ Carmen Gray

## CREDITS

**Producers**  
Danny Potts  
Nick Barratt  
**Written by**  
Lee Sales  
George Russo  
Francis Pope  
**Director of Photography**  
James Friend  
**Editor**  
Kieron Hawkes  
**Production Designers**  
Danny Rogers  
Celina Norris  
**Sound Mixer**  
Justin Smith  
**Costume Designer**  
Frances Hounson

©OP Films  
**Executive Producers**  
Francis Pope  
Leo Pearlman  
Chris Gilder

## CAST

Ophelia Lovibond  
Sophie  
George Russo  
George  
Francis Pope  
Frani  
Neil Maskell  
Scott  
Kyle Summercorn  
Terry  
Neil Large  
Neil  
Zara Dawson  
Zara  
Sonny Muslim  
Chris  
Fabrizio Santino  
Lee  
Peter Ferdinando  
Pottsy  
Ricci Harnett  
Grant  
Ben Drew  
John

In Colour

**Distributor**  
Revolver Entertainment

# Way of the Morris

Great Britain 2010

Directors: Tim Plester, Rob Curry

Early in Tim Plester and Rob Curry's nicely affectionate, avowedly personal film on Morris dancing, presenter Plester admits not only to his own previous immunity to its charms (as a young man, he says, he was more attracted to glam rock) but also that "this sceptred isle's most ancient and enduring of roots traditions" is usually regarded at best as some kind of national joke (albeit one that, though ruthlessly exploited in the likes of Lucy Akhurst's *Morris: A Life with Bells On*, is also regarded with a certain tender indulgence). Part of the charm of Curry and Plester's occasionally wacky, sometimes verbose documentary ("Come dowsing for the Morris in this patchwork of borderlands," Plester intones without irony) comes from Plester's own journey from sceptic to professed admirer and tyro practitioner.

Given that Plester was born in the village of Adderbury (the home, it seems, of the simpler Blunt choreography named after village folk historian Janet Blunt, who jotted down what she saw without the embellishments of the so-called 'Cecil Sharp' tradition practised by most modern Morris men), you can see how the subject must have suggested itself to him, and how his journey was to some extent preordained. Plester has some delightful Super 8 footage shot by his grandfather, capturing family and village in halcyon 1970s summers, which he dovetails neatly with new footage and easily consumable history lessons – outlining, for instance, Morris's disputed origins as an import from the North African Berber people, the Crusades or Muslim Iberia; naming its 19 native dances and their respective steps, skips, double-hops, capers and roundelays; and offering renditions of its rousing songs in praise of ale, tobacco and friendship, or laments for lost love, of longing and regret.

In addition, Curry and Plester's inclusion of a quite lengthy section depicting a journey of commemoration by today's Adderbury Morris men to the Somme, where all but one of the pre-WWI team died in the trenches, serves as a quietly eloquent confirmation of the directors' own view about the significance and enduring pull of Morris dancing, which they see – with the enthusiasm of the newly converted – as an important, soil-rooted, cultural 'ritual' rather than a merely outdated touristic entertainment. In this context, they quote Morris dancing's peasant roots, and how the Adderbury's team's insistence on village-only membership is an expression of their desire to keep their 'working-class' nature and sense of 'lived experience'.

So far, so fuddy-duddy. But it's to Curry and Plester's credit that their small-budget enterprise never seems overly myopic, parochial or self-consumed. That's partly due to Plester's



Let's dance: 'Way of the Morris'

gentle, self-mocking onscreen persona – one more than willing to expose, for instance, his own borderline-incompetent first efforts at Morris steps. On the other hand, it's hard to divine the reasons for Curry and Plester's excesses in their use of framing devices and commentary: the pre-credit sequence – which proffers a creation theory, with animated graphic, of Old Mr Fox 'dancing up' the world – seems aimed at drug-addled denizens of the Glastonbury folk tent, whereas Plester's overexerted invocations to conjure up the "spirit of Jack-in-the-Green and Old John Barleycorn!" bespeak a writer clearly succumbing to in-character logorrhoea. Or it's proof, perhaps, of filmmakers unable to take themselves too seriously. Either way, it doesn't prevent them delivering a documentary that's as diverting as it is quirkily amusing and quietly moving.

◆ Wally Hammond

## CREDITS

**Written by**  
Tim Plester  
**Director of Photography**  
Richard Mitchell  
**Film Editor**  
Jono Griffith  
**Composer & Musical Supervisor**  
Adrian Coker  
**Sound Recordists**  
Michael Lee Taylor  
Dario Swade  
Justin Smith  
Nadine Richardson  
James Benson

©Tim Plester & Fifth Column Films  
**Production Companies**  
Fifth Column Films  
presents a documentary film by  
Tim Plester  
**Executive Producer**  
Colin Teague

In Colour  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Fifth Column Films Ltd

**SYNOPSIS** Forty-year-old London-based actor, playwright and filmmaker Tim Plester revisits the village he grew up in, Adderbury, in rural Oxfordshire, and describes his family's, his village's and England's connections with the tradition of Morris dancing. Principal interviewees are villager Bryan Sheppard, one of a side of Morris men who revived the art in the mid-1970s (and who featured on the Fairport Convention album *Son of Morris On*); Plester's father and uncle (both serving, or ex-serving, Morris men); and musician and broadcaster Billy Bragg. The Adderbury Morris men are filmed in practice, in outdoor display and visiting the Thiepval War Memorial in the Somme, where all but one of the 1913 side were killed in active service, leading to a 60-year hiatus in the hitherto vibrant local tradition. During the 2010 Adderbury summer festival, Plester is persuaded, for the first time, to don baldric and bells and perform a dance on the village green.



24 Hour Party People: Ophelia Lovibond, George Russo

**SYNOPSIS** London, the present. Smalltime drug-dealer George and his girlfriend Sophie have put a deposit on a holiday, and need to pay the balance. George, whose associate has just been arrested, has cashflow problems. Tensions arise because of Sophie's constant spending and the fact that George doesn't pay her enough attention; this comes to a head at a friend's house when Sophie wants to leave but a coked-up George won't accompany her. Desperate to follow through on his holiday promise, George secretly uses Sophie's savings to buy an ounce of cocaine to sell. Their relationship problems worsen when he spends more time out, trying to make the money back. Unable to pay for the holiday in time, George is forced to tell Sophie what he's done with her savings. She breaks up with him.

Three months later, George delivers a birthday card for Sophie containing the money he owes her.

# You Instead

United Kingdom 2011

Director: David Mackenzie

Certificate 15 80m 10s

Glasgow-based director David Mackenzie continues to defy the gloom-mongers in the British film industry by prolifically turning out his own brand of not-quite-classifiable movies. His apocalyptic sci-fi love story *Perfect Sense* will be released later this year, but before then pop-festival frolic *You Instead* provides the lightest entry to date in a filmography where bad love seems to be the common thread (see *Young Adam*, *Asylum*, *Hallam Foe*, *Spread*). Clocking in at a compact 80 minutes, *You Instead* is as much a *jeu d'esprit* and a filmmaking experiment as it is a fully fledged story in its own right, built around the skeletal romcom outline of boy and girl overcoming initial antipathy to realise they're made for each other, all the while handcuffed together by a passing prankster at Scotland's Glastonbury equivalent, T in the Park. The characterisation is fairly sketchy and the cuffing device certainly outstays its welcome – but the film derives a certain zest from the particular circumstances of its production, since it's obvious on screen that the whole thing must largely have been shot during the festival weekend.

The film's press notes confirm a five-day shoot, with the characters' live sets in the can on the Thursday before the crowds arrived, and editor Jake Roberts and his team on site in Portakabins throughout, checking the footage for any technical foibles requiring an instant reshoot. It's apparent from the finished version that a certain amount of post-synch was required to clean up the dialogue, but otherwise there are real gains in immediacy from filming on the hoof. Copious television coverage of the UK's summer pop events has created a generation of armchair festival-goers for whom the notion of lumpy groundsheets, lethal veggie burgers and toilet queues holds little appeal; Mackenzie's film goes that bit further in the you-are-there stakes, capturing both the on- and offstage milieu, and for the most part deftly integrating the actors within the festival fray. It must have been tough, and the leads look pretty much frazzled at times, which provides a certain authenticity not quite present in Thomas Leveritt's occasionally forced screenplay. The handcuffs are a rather blatant plot device, though the unexpected musical communication building between Luke Treadaway's high-gloss California popster and Natalia Tena's British indie femme-rocker turns out to be rather more persuasive. That's especially true in the movie's best sequence and key turning-point: when the cuffed duo share keyboards during Morello's band's performance, Adam's illicit intermingling of a cover of 'Tainted Love' proves a moment of inspired fusion.

Neither *Brothers of the Head* veteran Treadaway (whose West Coast accent seems to come and go) nor musician



Cuff love: Luke Treadaway, Natalia Tena

Tena possesses the full movie-star allure the roles require but, like his charmingly geeky bandmate Matthew Baynton, they're more comfortable in the improv zone than supporting turn Gavin Mitchell, whose clunking portrayal of a boorish manager is a strain to watch. Still, with enough barbed wit in the dialogue to keep it diverting, the whole thing has an in-the-moment buzz which helps us forgive

(if not entirely forget) the slightly creaky story mechanics. Moreover, far from slinging together bits and bobs of what looks like one-take, best-we-could-get material, Mackenzie and his ace cameraman Giles Nuttgens bring us a riot of expressive colour and movement in the live performances, and deftly pick out all manner of transient curiosities hither and thither on site.

♦♦ Trevor Johnston

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Gillian Berrie  
**Screenplay**  
Thomas Leveritt  
Additional writing by the  
Director and Cast  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Giles Nuttgens  
**Editor**  
Jake Roberts  
**Production Designer**  
Judi Ritchie  
**Sound Designer**  
Douglas MacDougall  
**Costume Designer**  
Kelly Cooper Barr

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Creative Scotland a  
Sigma Film production  
A David Mackenzie film  
Supported by the  
National Lottery  
through Creative  
Scotland  
**Executive Producers**  
Jamie Laurenson  
Christine Langan  
Robbie Allen

Carole Sheridan  
Phil Hunt  
Compton Ross  
Geoff Ellis  
Malte Grunert  
David Mackenzie

## CAST

**Luke Treadaway**  
Adam  
**Natalia Tena**  
Morello  
**Matthew Baynton**  
Tyko  
**Ruta Gedmintas**  
Lake  
**Gilly Gilchrist**  
Bruce the roadie

**Alastair Mackenzie**  
Mark  
**Gavin Mitchell**  
Bobby  
**Joseph Mydell**  
the prophet  
**Jonny Phillips**  
Jay  
**Kassidy**  
The View  
**The Proclaimers**  
themselves

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**

**Distributor**  
Icon Film Distribution

7,215 ft +0 frames

**SYNOPSIS** The 2010 T in the Park music festival at Balado, Kinross. Adam and Tyko – aka Californian duo The Make – encounter British indie femme-rockers The Dirty Pinks. Morello, lead singer of The Dirty Pinks, is handcuffed to Adam by passing stranger 'the Prophet', who preaches the power of musical togetherness. Morello takes an instant dislike to Adam, who surreptitiously signals for Tyko (secretly in possession of the keys) not to unlock them. When Adam's partner Lake arrives, Morello mischievously pretends to be his girlfriend. Later, the arrival of Morello's banker boyfriend Mark highlights the strains in their relationship – and when Adam intervenes with a crowd-pleasing segue into 'Tainted Love' during The Dirty Pinks' set, Morello suspects that he is a more suitable partner for her. After both couples bed down in a yurt, Lake leaves; Mark realises that his relationship with Morello has run its course. The sexual tension between Adam and Morello finds an outlet when they have to shower together. The Prophet returns; now freed, Morello storms off after discovering that Tyko had the keys to the handcuffs all along. On stage, The Make perform 'You Instead'. Adam gets the crowd to chant his plea for Morello to join them. Adam and Morello kiss on stage.

## CREDITS UPDATE

The review of this film was published in the September issue but unfortunately credits were unavailable at the time of going to press.

## Fright Night

USA 2011

Certificate 15 105mn 50s

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Michael De Luca  
Alison Rosenzweig  
**Screenplay**  
Marti Noxon  
**Story**  
Tom Holland  
Based on the film *Fright Night*  
Written by Tom Holland  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Javier Aguirresarobe  
**Edited by**  
Tatiana S. Riegel  
**Production Designer**  
Richard Bridgland  
Fitzgerald  
**Music**  
Ramin Djawadi  
**Production Sound**  
**Mixer**  
Lori Dovi  
**Costume Designer**  
Susan Matheson  
**Visual Effects**  
Luma Pictures  
Shade FX  
Pixel Magic Visual  
Effects  
Hammerhead  
Productions, Inc.  
**Visual Effects**  
**& Animation**  
Digital Domain

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Dreamworks Pictures  
and Reliance  
Entertainment present a  
Michael De Luca and  
Gaeta/Rosenzweig  
production  
A Craig Gillespie film  
Touchstone Pictures  
**Executive Producers**  
Ray Angelic  
Josh Bratman  
Michael Gaeta  
Lloyd Miller

## CAST

**Anton Yelchin**  
Charley Brewster  
**Colin Farrell**  
Jerry  
**Christopher Mintz-Plasse**  
Ed  
**David Tennant**  
Peter Vincent  
**Imogen Poots**  
Amy  
**Toni Collette**  
Jane Brewster  
**Dave Franco**  
Mark  
**Emily Montague**  
Doris  
**Will Denton**  
Adam  
**Reid Ewing**  
Ben  
**Sandra Vergara**  
Ginger  
**Chris Sarandon**  
Jay Dee  
**Grace Phipps**  
Bee

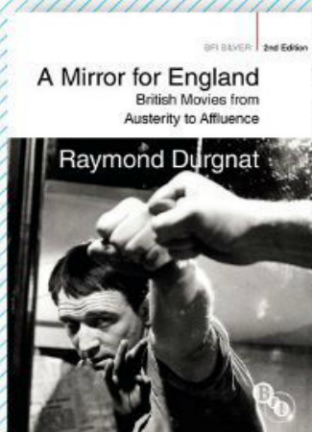
**Dolby Digital/DTS/**  
**SDDS**

**In Colour/Black and**  
**White**  
**Prints by**  
DeLuxe  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Buena Vista  
International (UK)

9,525 ft +0 frames

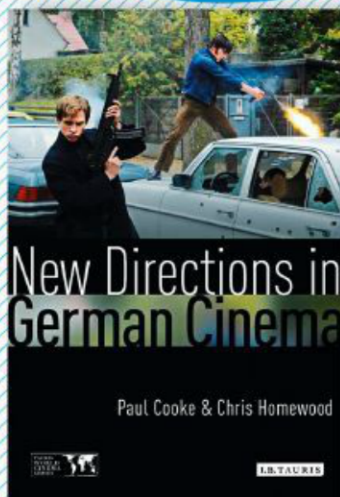
# Read



## **TA Mirror for England, 2nd edition**

By Raymond Durnat, BFI Silver series, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 288pp, illustrated, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781844574537

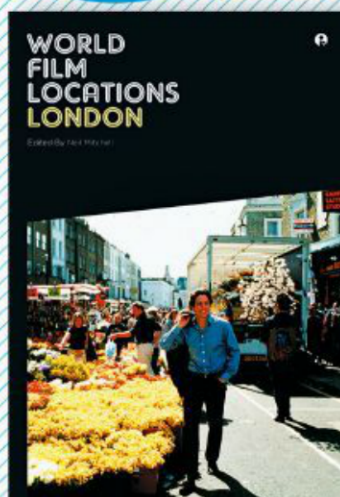
A new edition of a classic study by one of the 20th century's most influential film critics. In *A Mirror for England* Raymond Durnat explores how the middle-class view of life as expressed in British cinema transformed our understanding of British films and the British national character. His sharp yet sympathetic comments hone blurred memories and throw a startling new light on 20 years of films, from *In Which We Serve* in the 1940s, through *The Blue Lamp* and the Hammer horrors, to *Our Mother's House* in the late 1960s. The book now features a new introduction by Kevin Gough-Yates. [www.palgrave.com/bfi](http://www.palgrave.com/bfi)



## **New Directions in German Cinema**

Edited by Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood, I.B. Tauris, 320pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781848859074

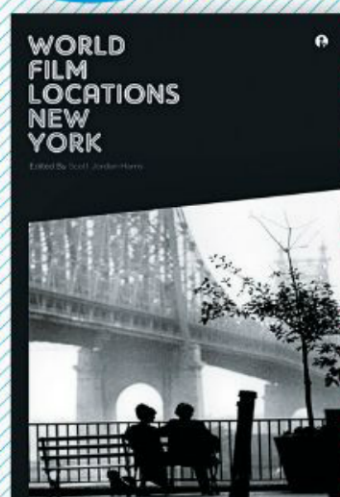
Germany's national film industry has been undergoing a remarkable resurgence since the beginning of the new millennium. German-language films such as *Downfall* have been receiving Oscar nominations – *The Lives of Others* winning Best Foreign Language Film in 2007 – and all the main international festivals, from Berlin to Cannes, have been showcasing these films. German-language cinema is again attracting attention at home and abroad, and *New Directions in German Cinema* explores its developments since 2000. [www.ibtauris.com](http://www.ibtauris.com)



## **World Film Locations: London**

Edited by Neil Mitchell, Intellect Books, 128pp, illustrated, paperback, £9.95, ISBN 9781841504841

The volume contains concise but knowledgeable reviews of carefully chosen film scenes and evocative essays about key directors, themes, ideas and historical periods that explore London's relationship to cinema. The book is illustrated throughout with scene-specific screen-grabs, stills of filming locations as they appear now and city maps that include location information for those keen to investigate the cinematic landmarks of London. "A superb book, indispensable for any cinephile interested in London's psychogeography. I could pore over it for hours." Peter Bradshaw [www.intellectbooks.com](http://www.intellectbooks.com)



## **World Film Locations: New York**

Edited by Scott Jordan Harris, Intellect Books, 128pp, illustrated, paperback, £9.95, ISBN 9781841504827

*World Film Locations: New York* is a visually compelling and incisively written examination – and celebration – of New York's unique place in cinema. Essays focusing on quintessential New York filmmakers like Woody Allen, Martin Scorsese and members of the Beat movement are presented alongside others on key features of the New York landscape and the role of the city in the imaginations of filmmakers and viewers. "An elegant tribute to the films and locations that have given New York its private real estate in our minds. The contributors are so immediately readable and movie-savvy." Roger Ebert [www.intellectbooks.com](http://www.intellectbooks.com)

# Love and other drugs



The needle and the damage done: Kitty Winn, Al Pacino

*Al Pacino injects charisma and streetwise swagger into one of the overlooked gems of the 1970s, says James Bell*

## The Panic in Needle Park

Jerry Schatzberg; US 1971; Second Sight / Region 2; 110 minutes; Certificate 18; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 Features: video interviews with the filmmakers

We first see the livewire junkie Bobby as he struts through the crowds on a bustling New York street. He's darting his eyes, bobbing his shoulders and swinging his arms out wide, daring anybody to get in his space. It's a walk that's magnetic with volatile charisma, and marks the movies' proper introduction to Al Pacino, then 31 and cast in his first leading role. It's an unforgettable entrance, and Bobby is one of Pacino's greatest creations – an unmistakable New Yorker, who critic J. Hoberman memorably described as a cross between De Niro's Johnny Boy and Woody Allen's Alvy Singer in his combustible mix of street-smart swagger and craving vulnerability.

'The Panic in Needle Park' takes a street-level view of the blighted lives of heroin addicts, and Bobby is one of its casualties, convincing nobody when he insists, "I'm not hooked, I'm just chipping". The strutting Bobby is on his way to supply drugs to artist Marco (Raul Julia), whose innocent Midwest-born girlfriend Helen (Kitty Winn) has just had a backstreet abortion, and lies convulsed in pain when Bobby arrives at their loft apartment. Bobby is smitten, and later blags his way into the hospital Helen has checked herself into and charms her with his kindness. It's the

start of a romance that draws the pair into a downward spiral that the film chronicles with a startling frankness.

The screenplay was written by Joan Didion and her husband John Gregory Dunne, who were inspired by 'Life' magazine writer James Mills's book about the addicts who congregated at what was known in New York as Needle Park (in fact the intersection at Broadway and 72nd Street). The producer was Dunne's brother Dominick, the prized journalist best known for his work in 'Vanity Fair'. Yet despite the pedigree of its creators, 'The Panic in Needle Park' has remained – much like the career of its director Jerry Schatzberg – one of the overlooked gems of 1970s US cinema.

In the early 70s Schatzberg seemed as destined as Scorsese, Coppola or Polanski for a major filmmaking career, winning the Palme d'Or in 1973 for his third film 'Scarecrow', a buddy road movie that paired Pacino with Gene Hackman. Schatzberg had made his name as a hip photographer (most famously, he shot the iconic portrait that graced the cover of Dylan's 'Blonde on Blonde' album), and made his directorial debut with 'Puzzle of a Downfall Child' (1970), a story about a former model (Faye Dunaway) looking back on her career. After making 'Puzzle' Schatzberg had intended to return to photography, but his agent passed him the script for 'Needle Park', and on hearing that Pacino was interested, Schatzberg decided he had to do it (the studio, Fox, took more convincing, and insisted that Schatzberg audition other actors, among them Robert De Niro).

Pacino's performance ought to have

**The junkie Bobby is one of Pacino's greatest creations**

been a star-making one, and in a sense it was: watching with a keen interest was Francis Ford Coppola, who had seen Pacino on stage and been convinced he was right for the role of Michael Corleone, but was struggling to persuade Paramount to hire a then unknown actor. Schatzberg lent Coppola some of the 'Needle Park' rushes, and seeing them finally swayed the Paramount executives.

Kitty Winn, who was suggested to Schatzberg by Dominick Dunne, has a vulnerable, compelling face and – though her performance doesn't have Pacino's fireworks – is hugely affecting as Helen, and a perfect foil for Pacino. Winn was awarded the best actress prize at Cannes, and went on to appear in 'The Exorcist', but then faded into early retirement, a promising career inexplicably lost.

It's a beautifully photographed film – unsurprisingly given Schatzberg's background – and done full justice by the pin-sharp restoration on Second Sight's new DVD. Polish DP Adam Holender achieves a documentary-like realism, shooting from distance with long lenses for the street scenes, picking out the characters in the crowded New York streets, and in forensic close-up for the interior drug-taking scenes, sparing us no details, such as needles entering veins.

Hanging over 'Needle Park' is the deflated melancholy of the immediate post-1960s. Gone are the psychedelic colours and groovy sounds; instead the visual palette is muted, and Schatzberg uses no music at all. Bobby and Helen's New York is the wild place that many at the time believed had become ungovernable and beyond saving.

Appropriately, Schatzberg's harrowing but crucial film offers its characters no fairytale redemption, suggesting that, like their city, their dope-ravaged lives were only going to slide into oblivion.

## Before the Revolution

Bernardo Bertolucci; Italy 1964; BFI/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 12; 107 minutes (DVD)/112 minutes (Blu-ray); Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 anamorphic (DVD); Features: 'Working Copy' and 'Bertolucci Self-Portrait' documentaries, interviews with Bernardo Bertolucci, Ennio Morricone, Roberto Perpignani and Vittorio Storaro, on-set footage, trailer, booklet

**Film:** Even without the prior knowledge that Bertolucci was a precocious 22 when he began work on it, *Before the Revolution* is obviously a young man's film. It breathlessly crams in literary, musical and cinematic references with all the obsessive dedication of a teenage list-maker: it's a loose adaptation of Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma*, with Verdi's opera *Macbeth* performed at the climax, and its Howard Hawks/neorealism/*nouvelle vague* namechecks give some idea of the various stylistic pulls on Bertolucci's own aesthetic.

The film seems just as uncertain of its protagonist Fabrizio's worldview as he himself is. It's the first of Bertolucci's mash-ups of Marx and Freud, the former notionally Fabrizio's idol (but only up to a point, since his bourgeois lifestyle is a little too comfortable to relinquish), the latter governing his impulsive and ill-advised relationship with his attractive but neurotic aunt Gina (Adriana Asti, Bertolucci's wife at the time).

**Disc:** This is an outstanding package, starting with a lustrous high-definition transfer of the main feature. Aside from a recent (April 2011) BFI Southbank Q&A with Bertolucci and the usual comprehensive booklet, the wide-ranging supplements have been ported across from Ripley Home Video's acclaimed Italian edition and are none the worse for that. (MB)

## The Colour of Pomegranates

Sergei Paradjanov; USSR 1969; Second Sight/Region 2; Certificate U; 70 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: commentary, 'The World in a Window' documentary, 'Memories of Sayat Nova' short film

**Film:** Unique in form and content, Sergei Paradjanov's notional biopic of the Armenian poet and musician Sayat Nova sidelines his actual dates (1712-95) in favour of a tableaux-based treatment seemingly drawn from the medieval era and a fetishistic exploration of Armenian architecture, costume, music and ritual traditions. However, as anthropologist Levon Abrahamian points out in his invaluable commentary, while the props and costumes are often authentic, Paradjanov tends to invent his own folklore. Art historians accordingly find the film easier to 'read' than film critics do – though its visual and aural pleasures are open to anyone with eyes and ears.

**Disc:** Four previous DVD editions – from Kino, Films Sans Frontières, Rusico and Columbia (Japan) – have been compromised in various ways, but

this is fifth time lucky. Rights issues prevented the inclusion of both cuts (the Armenian release, misleadingly named the 'director's cut', and the Soviet cut by director Sergei Yutkevich). Second Sight has wisely opted for the Yutkevich edition which – though further removed from Paradjanov's now-destroyed original cut – survives in far better condition than the earlier Armenian release. Visually, this is comfortably the best the film has ever looked on the small screen, and its conscientious subtitles highlight the spoken language, clarifying the tableau featuring the same poem recited three times, in Azerbaijani, Georgian and Armenian. The commentary and the documentary (by Daniel Bird) provide encyclopedic information about the film's content, production and complicated reception, while Levon Grigoryan's 2006 short 'Memories of Sayat Nova' creatively refashions some of the deleted footage. (MB)

#### Films by Maurice Elvey

##### You Lucky People!

UK 1955; BFI/Region 2; Certificate U; 76 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: booklet

##### Fun at St Fanny's

UK 1956; BFI/Region 2; Certificate U; 77 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: film notes, essays

**Films:** British director Maurice Elvey started making films before the First World War, and over a long career that stretched to the late 1950s directed almost 200 pictures.

These two cheap and cheerful comedies, both made for Adelphi, date from the end of his career. *You Lucky People!* is an army comedy along *Carry On Sergeant/Dad's Army* lines. Tommy Trinder stars as Private Tommy Sharp, a snappy-suited spiv recalled to army duty well after the war for some compulsory training. Needless to say, he is soon being browbeaten by a sadistic sergeant major and barking officers who remember him from the old days. Trinder is forced to undergo every manner of barrack-room indignity but never loses his trademark chirpiness. He wrote some of his own dialogue, though it's hardly sparkling stuff ("I don't put my name to anything I don't understand. I might find myself playing for the Arsenal!" he complains when required to sign for his uniform). Trinder's patter can be grating but the film has a certain historical curiosity value (not least for the appearance of a very youthful Rolf Harris in an unobtrusive cameo as 'bearded soldier'). It also underlines just how hooked on army stories British cinema remained a full decade after the end of the war.

Made a year later, *Fun at St Fanny's* is a school-days comedy based on British comic Cardew Robinson's 'Cardew the Cad' character, who featured in a radio show and comic strip. He's a student at St Fanny's, one of Britain's most elite public schools, but he is so dim that he's been there for 16 years without even learning



## The Colour of Pomegranates

### Paradjanov's film is unique in form and content, its visual and aural pleasures open to anyone with eyes and ears

the date of the Battle of Hastings. The screenplay is on the feeble side but the film still elicits laughs with its sub-*Beano* characterisation and engagingly over-the-top performances from Fred Emney (as the blustering, walrus-like headmaster in the mortarboard and tweed jacket – a plumper variation on the pedagogues Will Hay used to play) and Robinson himself as the lanky, toothy, very adult 'schoolboy' in the long scarf. The film's absurdist humour hasn't dated ("What is an octopus?" a teacher asks. "An eight-sided cat," comes the inevitable reply).

**Discs:** These two films, issued separately, are the latest in the BFI's ongoing series of Adelphi releases (earlier collections include a Diana Dors double-bill and films by John Guillermin and Anthony Young as well as others by Elvey). As the accompanying booklet on *You Lucky People!* reveals, Tommy Trinder's financial demands were almost more than the production could sustain. Plans to film in colour CinemaScope had to be abandoned to save money (a different process called CameraScope was used instead, though it's hard to see quite why Elvey wanted to shoot such humdrum material in widescreen). The film, which has been transferred in high definition from the original negatives, looks clean enough.

Similar care has been paid to the *Fun at St Fanny's* release, which comes with a booklet that includes an essay by comedian Ronnie Corbett, who appears in the film. (GM)

#### The Endless Summer

Bruce Brown; US 1966; Go Entertainment/Region 2; 92 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: 'Endless Summer Revisited'

**Film:** This self-funded chase-the-summer surfing documentary by 'the Fellini of foam' Bruce Brown was met with suspicion from distributors ("It won't play ten feet from the sea") but rapidly became the world's window on the sport, a sort of anti-*Gidget*. Equal parts hobbyist's home movie, tongue-in-cheek travelogue and blithe record of the search for 'the perfect wave', it melds exhilarating footage of young surfers Mike Hynson and Robert August hunting out surf from Senegal to Tahiti, with wildlife forays and clowning skits. If good-humoured gaucheries about whether the African 'natives' are friendly seem ill-judged now, the aw-shucks enthusiasm conveyed by Brown's commentary for everything from body-boarding Ghanaians to unfriendly zebras remains undimmed. Shot by Brown himself on 16mm, and choppy with levered-in footage of surfing luminaries performing athletically in California and Hawaii, the film nevertheless delivers some gorgeous sequences. Best of all is Hynson riding the longest wave imaginable at Cape St Francis in South Africa as nonchalantly as if he were walking along a pavement.

**Disc:** A perfectly pleasant transfer, which retains its original custard-yellow sands and azure skies. It's accompanied by a mellow if distinctly overlong

documentary celebrating the film's making and the hang-loose California surf subculture of the early 1960s that produced it. So mellow, in fact, that it skims over the issue of Mike Hynson's lurid later years, which merit a movie of their own. (KS)

#### Father

István Szabó; Hungary 1966; Second Run/Region 0; Certificate 12; 85 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: booklet

**Film:** For those more familiar with István Szabó's internationally oriented post-*Mephisto* output, his second feature comes as a delightful surprise. The subject-matter is hardly unusual in Hungarian cinema, tracing the changes wrought both on individuals and the nation between WWII and 1956. However, Szabó wittily examines this from the point of view of Takó, an imaginative young boy who filters events through the prism of an idealised fictionalisation of his late father, a perfectly ordinary doctor who morphs into a groundbreaking surgeon, a partisan hero and even a Stalinist dictator. When Takó reaches introspective adulthood, these fantasies still govern his worldview at a time when he should be paying attention to more insidious myths being promoted by the powers that be. (Szabó is necessarily circumspect about these, but drops plenty of clues.) *Billy Liar* and early Truffaut have been cited as comparisons: both are amply justified. **Disc:** This is an excellent director-approved transfer, making the most of Sándor Sára's crisp monochrome cinematography. The hefty booklet essay is by Hungarian cinema expert John Cunningham. (MB)

#### The Garden of the Finzi-Contini

Vittorio De Sica; Italy/West Germany 1970; Arrow Academy/Region 2; Certificate 12; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 anamorphic; Features: trailer, interviews with Lino Capolicchio, Manuel De Sica and Ugo Pirro, booklet

**Film:** De Sica's late creative comeback has been surprisingly hard to see in Britain since its original release, when it bagged him his fourth Oscar and the Berlin Golden Bear. The film is adapted from Giorgio Bassani's novel, and many of its metaphors are similarly literary, chiefly the use of the walled garden as a symbol of the isolation of the wealthy Finzi-Contini family not merely from Ferrara's other Jews but also from local laws that ostensibly affect them, as the Mussolini regime introduces initially halfhearted but ultimately murderous anti-Semitic policies. This arrogance is embodied in the persona of Dominique Sanda's Micol Finzi-Contini as she leads on Giorgio (Lino Capolicchio) before delivering one of cinema's cruellest snubs: when caught in

flagrant with a man she has claimed not to fancy, she doesn't even bother to cover up her body.

**Disc:** The usually reliable Arrow Academy label drops the ball with a transfer whose ill-advised digital

Life's a beach: 'The Endless Summer'



## NEW RELEASES

clean-up has left everything looking unpleasantly waxy and artificial. This is a real shame, as the package is otherwise excellent, featuring recent interviews with the star, co-writer and composer and the usual comprehensive context-setting booklet. (MB)

**The Killing**

Stanley Kubrick; US 1956; Criterion/Region 1 NTSC DVD/Region A Blu-ray; 84 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: video interviews with producer James B. Harris and poet/author Robert Polito, French TV interviews with Sterling Hayden, Kubrick's 1955 feature 'Killer's Kiss' with video appreciation by Geoffrey O'Brien, trailers

**Film:** Johnny Clay, the detail-oriented mastermind played by Sterling Hayden, choreographs and times his racetrack robbery down to the last second in Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing*. The film's diced timeline and stopwatch narration make the viewer complicit, so that we share Clay's heightened awareness of the clock and the importance of synchronous action. It's all for nothing: a nosy dame, a faulty suitcase clasp and a rambunctious toy dog are enough to undo Clay's best-laid plans and perfect performance, proof that the most meticulous rehearsals can still foul up. It's a nightmare to

fulfil a perfectionist's worst paranoia – apt, given the 27-year-old Kubrick's later professional reputation.

There's plenty of comeuppance to go round but Timothy Carey's sharpshooter gets it first, before the heist is even carried out. A towering, heavy-lidded character actor who plays his scenes with a wheedling unctuousness, Carey is one of the standouts in an ensemble that might've been conceived as a tribute to the golden age of ugly white guy character actors: Joe Sawyer, footsore and faded; porridge-mugged Jay C. Flippen; Ted de Corsia's sticky-looking cop; and Elisha Cook Jr, eternally the unsavoury runt, towered over and toyed with by Marie Windsor's two-timing wife.

They all get theirs in the end, even Windsor – although, being a woman, she gets the last word. Her marriage? "Just a bad joke without a punchline." Such *bon mots* are attributable to pulp novelist Jim Thompson, getting his first screenwriting credit here for 'dialogue'. Thompson's role is discussed by biographer Robert Polito in one of the ample extras, which include a recent interview with producer James B. Harris, who gives Kubrick and himself credit for *The Killing's* rather good ending.

*The Killing* was the first film Kubrick made after relocating to Los Angeles



It's a steal: Sterling Hayden in 'The Killing'

with Harris. With its sliding-through-walls Ophuls-like shots passing along railroad flats, it was Kubrick's most polished to date, the calling card that led to *Paths of Glory*, and further glories. Like many directors before and after, Kubrick found the heist an ideal medium for master-builder cinema with a flamboyant signature ("You know, I've often thought that the gangster and the artist are the same in the eyes of the masses..." begins one character's musing).

Also included with this Criterion release is *Killer's Kiss*, Kubrick's first run at *noir* from the previous year.

It's no great shakes as dramatic writing but it's full of sombre atmosphere, an evocative resurrection of the crummy New York the director had trawled as a *Look* photographer: a Times Square hived with boxing gyms and taxi-dance halls, and the post-apocalyptically empty canyon-streets of the Brooklyn waterfront. As a multi-hyphenate one-man band, Kubrick takes credit for the glimpses of genius, as well as for sluggish passages like a showcase for his second wife, ballerina Ruth Sobotka, and a long, flailing climactic brawl in a mannequin warehouse. The quantum leap of *The Killing* proves that, Johnny Clay's example aside, even genius benefits from collaboration.

**Disc:** A bang-up job from Criterion. Immaculate images of dingy people and places, and teeming with extras. (NP)

**Films by Chris Marker*****La Jétée/Sans soleil***

France 1962/83; Optimum Releasing/Region 2; Certificate 15; 29/100 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1

***Level Five***

France 1997; Optimum Releasing/Region 2; Certificate 12; 106 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3

**Films:** The theme of memory is a career-constant for Marker, endlessly reworked and built upon – one might as well castigate Monet for a fascination with flowers. From the famous poignancy of *La Jétée* to the happiness-hunting travelogue *Sans soleil*, memory is Marker's marker. *Level Five*, his last theatrical feature before his dive into

new media, divides his fans (a *Senses of Cinema* commentary dismisses it as "a dreary shell of an essay") with its internet-fixated musings on the fate of historical memory, but Marker still packs in more ideas per inch than anyone save Godard. Layering a fictional act of mourning around an online videogame investigating the battle of Okinawa, it's an archive-based cine-essay advancing several of the themes and formal experiments begun in *Sans soleil*. Images are interrogated rigorously both intellectually and physically: slowed, smeared and pixellated, a marine's footage of a Saipan woman's suicide becomes a meditation on the act of watching. It's harder to thrill to Marker's William Gibson-inflected network fascination, which has lost the shock of the new, or to his clunky computer graphics. But the film explores the slippery border between video and computer work, and between analogue and digital worlds, with an elegant, sometimes prescient curiosity. When watched with Marker's two most famous offerings, which are being released simultaneously, the three set off reverberations in one another, as when the loneliness of *La Jétée's* lost dream-lover finds an echo in *Level Five's* heroine, whose memories of her partner are eroding daily. Given their interweaving themes, re-viewing them becomes as much chamber piece as retrospective.

**Discs:** *Level Five's* deliberately degraded images notwithstanding, these are perfectly fine transfers. All three come naked as a jaybird, though, and a spot of contextualising or theorising finery would have come in handy. (KS)

**The Music Room**

Satyajit Ray; India 1958; Criterion/Region 1 NTSC/Region A Blu-ray; 99 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: 'Satyajit Ray' documentary, interviews with Andrew Robinson and Mira Nair, round-table discussion, booklet

**Film:** Satyajit Ray's fourth feature is still one of his most powerful. The opening image of the Lear-like figure of the aristocrat Biswambhar Roy (Chhabi

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Biswas) sitting on the roof of his crumbling mansion casts a powerful pall over the flashbacks that follow, as we see him using his love of Indian classical music to cling to traditions that are visibly vanishing. The throb of his neighbour's newly installed generator is a constantly irritating reminder of the march of progress; the music room in which he once hosted lavish concerts has now fallen into disrepair.

The film's set-piece concerts are mesmerising to watch, even to those with little knowledge of the form (Ray was happily mistaken in his belief that the film had no export value) but only serve to delay the inevitable, especially since these extravaganzas have a substantial financial and human price-tag attached.

**Disc:** A technically remarkable spruce-up of a badly compromised source, this is far from pristine but is nonetheless the best-looking Satyajit Ray disc to date. Generous extras include Shyam Benegal's documentary portrait (half an hour longer than the main feature), interviews with biographer Andrew Robinson and unabashed fan Mira Nair, a 1981 French round-table discussion whose participants include Ray himself, and a booklet with notes from *S&S* contributor Philip Kemp and archive pieces by Ray. (MB)

### The Police Story series

#### Police Story

Jackie Chan; Hong Kong 1985; 96 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9 anamorphic

#### Police Story Part 2

Jackie Chan; Hong Kong 1988; 101 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9 anamorphic

#### New Police Story

Benny Chan; Hong Kong 2004; 118 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1 anamorphic  
Cine-Asia/Region 2; Certificate 15;  
Features: audio commentaries by Hong Kong cinema experts Bey Logan and Miles Wood, interviews with Jackie Chan and collaborators, outtakes

**Films:** These three films are from the series that gave director-star-stunt choreographer Jackie Chan his biggest hits in Asia and provided a template for the Hollywoodisation of his star-vehicle formula in the *Rush Hour* movies.

*Police Story* is, as Chan cheerfully admits in an interview, a series of stunt/action set pieces he conceived and then commissioned a script to string together. Chan plays Inspector Chan, a risk-taking cop who spans the vigilante approach of Dirty Harry and the slapstick disaster-magnet style of Inspector Clouseau, and the major set pieces are a car chase through a hillside shantytown (imitated in 2003's *Bad Boys II*), a one-man-against-the-odds pursuit of a villain escaping in a hijacked bus, and an extraordinarily destructive fight over a bag of incriminating evidence which wrecks a shopping mall. In an unfortunate instance of the poor taste of the 1980s, the usually winning Brigitte Lin – as the unwilling witness Chan must protect – makes perhaps the worst hairstyle and wardrobe choices in Asia.

*Police Story Part 2* is a rare instance of a sequel that takes criticism of the

# Touching the void



In freefall: Liv Ullmann in 'Face to Face'

*An intense, stripped-bare psychodrama, 'Face to Face' reminds us why Bergman's films are essential viewing,*  
**says Michael Atkinson**

### Face to Face

Ingmar Bergman; Sweden 1976; Olive Films/Region 1 NTSC; 136 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1

The major Bergman film previously unavailable on English-subtitled DVD, this international psychodramatic hit (and double Oscar nominee) came well into the director's comfortable mandarin period, amid 'Scenes from a Marriage' (1973), 'The Magic Flute' (1975) and 'Autumn Sonata' (1978), though it feels in its particulars more like a film made seven or ten years earlier, when the globally beloved Swede was busy messing around with super-ego surrealism and limning in his unique way the interiority of psychological struggle. In fact, it may've been about this time, with the middle-ageing of the art-film era and the sense of histrionic repetition in Bergman's oeuvre, that the isolated master was beginning to be thought of in more derisive terms; going back as far as the satirical 1968 short 'De Döva' and looking ahead to the unforgettable Count Floyd 'Whispers of the Wolf' episode on Canadian sketch show 'SCTV' in 1978, things Bergmanesque – overt psychological symbolism, brooding seriousness, screaming spiritual crisis, Scanda-angst – became grist for farce. Bergman may have seemed in his meridian to be an indomitable voice, but his pantheon status since has been as fragile as an eggshell.

Still, as cinephiles with memories know, fashion will not win in the end, and Bergman, a classical giant with massive modernist ordnance, will re-emerge as essential for all ages, once we again

embrace earnestness and overt truth-seeking as acceptable cinematic ambitions. (No one, not even Antonioni, was as irony-free as Bergman.) 'Face to Face' is certainly a test case, going full bore into rubber-room dramatics with a toxic amperage only rivalled by Cassavetes. No less than 'Through a Glass Darkly' (1961) or 'Hour of the Wolf' (1968), the movie dives directly into the freefall of a psychotic break, beginning incrementally as Liv Ullmann's buttoned-down hospital shrink Jenny bunks with her grandparents while her husband is away at a conference and their new house is still being built. Everything seems perfectly sunny and successful, even after she dallies with a suave writer (Erland Josephson) at a party thrown by an ageing diva surrounded by gay boy-toys, and becomes gradually besieged by nightmares and visions. Pursuing a runaway patient to her own empty house, she is confronted by the *deus ex machina* of a pair of thugs, who try, unsuccessfully, to rape her (in a brilliant, unmoving bifurcated master shot). She shrugs off the assault as if it were a retail-clerk rudeness, but thereafter her grip on ordinary life starts to slip, and as her carefully hidden secrets hit the open air we witness as we haven't in many other films a whole-hog descent into madness.

Bergman's lock-step Freudianism may look a tad old-fashioned today, like an adaptive take on the recorded dreams of Sigmund's more famous hysterics. But the energy of his storytelling and his immersive way with actors never ages. By 1976 the filmmaker had swapped his mysterious, crepuscular, image-driven mode for gritty, unadorned realism, and

'Face to Face' rather boldly dives into symbol-laden subconscious sequences brimming with trite theatricality (Ullmann lurching through rooms in a blood-red nun's coif and robes, and trapped in small rooms sardine-packed with disfigured patients) that baldly illustrates the heroine's inner crisis. But unsurprisingly the unblinking commitment of both director and actress muster a gravitational field difficult to resist; if cinema is essentially voyeurism, allowing us to safely observe the tortured private moments of strangers, then the meltdown sequences of 'Face to Face' may be among the medium's most characteristic passages. With this film, more so than even 'Scenes from a Marriage', Ullmann became the decade's stripped-bare mega-thespian, capable of dragging us into a character's selfless, howling turmoil and making the trial uncomfortably convincing.

Of course, 'Face to Face', like so many of Bergman's mature films, remains a powerful feminist document, in which the conflicts and pressures of a modern woman's life create a literal rupture in her reality, a post-Germaine Greer revisiting of 'The Wide Sargasso Sea' in the context of a professional-class female's supposedly stable, privileged existence. This remains a way to grasp Bergman's films despite their sometimes out-of-date devices and never let go – their relevance as yowls of feminist frustration still rings. If for Bergman life seemed to be one long, painful therapy session, then it remained for his female protagonists a process left unresolved, with lingering questions and needs no man can fulfil.

Bergmaniacs will pounce on this long-awaited release, which ends a drought that's apparently been due to a simple lack of suitable materials. The Olive Films edition is a decent print but not a restoration, and the transfer has a touch of noticeably grey droopiness in the dark scenes. But the quality is generally fine, and the film vibrates with passion.

**We witness as we haven't in many other films a whole-hog descent into madness**

# Rock horror show

Post-punk melodrama  
'Breaking Glass' offers a fresh  
take on a familiar tale of fame  
and disillusion, says **Tim Lucas**

## Breaking Glass

Brian Gibson; UK 1980; Olive Films/  
Region 1; 104 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1

From Vincente Minnelli's song-studded remake of 'A Star Is Born' with Judy Garland (1954) to the Edith Piaf biopic 'La Vie en rose' (2007), movies about musicians' lives loom as tragically as film noir, with those about classical composers typically every bit as doomed in tone as those built around rock musicians and their greater resources for darkness – sex, drugs and electricity.

Post-punk melodrama 'Breaking Glass' – made when the year 1984 loomed in the near future, still fully invested with Orwellian dread – chronicled a familiar downward spiral for a generation of music fans who got their existentialism from Gary Numan rather than Jean-Paul Sartre. Viewed in retrospect, it fits neatly among such worthy fellow features as Brian De Palma's operatic send-up 'Phantom of the Paradise' (1974), Tom Hanks's 'That Thing You Do!' (1996) and Alex Proyas's underrated 'Garage Days' (2002) in its deft sketching of how a band comes together, finds its sound and fights for its chances – but being of its time it shares little of their brightness. It is more emotionally attuned to the inspired diptych that is Claude Whatham's 'That'll Be the Day' (1973) and Michael Apted's 'Stardust' (1974), and there is something about the deer-in-the-headlights look in the defiant eyes of its star Hazel O'Connor and the martial beat of her electro-pop that seems to grip its youth in the savage jaw of 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' long before it was due.

Written and directed by the late BBC alumnus Brian Gibson, who subsequently helmed biopics about Josephine Baker and Tina Turner, 'Breaking Glass' attends the rise of a London rock band assembled from disparate musicians by Danny (Phil Daniels), a young record-label hiree who furtively buys company product from different stores to help nudge its acts into the charts. He meets O'Connor's aspiring singer Kate in an alley after getting thrown out of a club for crude attempts at networking. He is perhaps more impressed by her commitment to career than her actual talent, and takes charge of a suddenly joint future by auditioning new musicians at her apartment – although she, as an angry young socialist, is initially opposed to capitalist goals such as a recording contract. After several musicians are ushered in to misfire, their chirpy sounds at odds with the PiL and Bowie posters on her walls, it's a genuine auditory thrill when the first player comes along whose



Raw ambition: Hazel O'Connor in 'Breaking Glass'

sound enhances what Kate is doing – it's Jonathan Pryce as Ken, a half-deaf saxophonist whose frenzied blowing gilds her sound with a dazzle worthy of Roxy Music's Andy MacKay.

The eventual band then fumble along through gigs in stout-flinging bars, their success measurable only by the damage done by enthusiastic fans. Then, in the standout scene, all the correct constellations converge – receptive audience, record people in attendance, a common anger – at a concert beset by a unionised blackout. Kate rallies her band into a magical acoustic performance that wows the crowd and wins them a spot in an upcoming 'Rock Against 1984' concert event. At that performance, another sequence of unforeseen events makes Kate and the band front-page news, and legendary music producer Bob Woods (Jon Finch) is brought in to produce their first album.

Then begins the process of Kate's packaging by the label, record executives playing the members of the band off one another, the pressures of touring, disintegration under duress, and Kate's alienation from her art at the very apex of its success. In the film's final performance, she appears on stage in a 'Tron'-like costume, her robotic choreography demonstrating the extent to which she has become the very cliché

**What's surprising is that the film manages to tell a tale this dark, in this milieu, without resorting to the usual profanity**

she warned against in the chorus of her first song: "You are a programme."

O'Connor, whose vocal mannerisms readily recall Lene Lovich, wrote 13 songs for the film (including one attributed to Kate's competitor Suzie Sapphire) which were produced by Bowie/T. Rex veteran Tony Visconti. It's a lot of music for a film of average length to absorb, and it's O'Connor's notable achievement that her character's arc can be charted through the rawness, maturation and ultimate arrival of her music at an unintended port, and that the film feels unsettling even though a good deal of what it actually has to say is delivered in the form of song lyrics. Considering the familiarity of the story it tells in its broadest strokes, the film must be credited for retaining its freshness and elements of surprise – not the least of which is that it manages to tell a tale this dark, in this milieu, without resorting to the usual profanity. Perhaps more startling is the youth of Jonathan Pryce (whose character is allowed to use heroin without kicking it) and Jim Broadbent, who turns up briefly as a station porter; it's they – rather than the music, which we expect to sound dated – who force us to reckon how much time has passed.

Olive Films' presentation of the Paramount Pictures release is no-frills, which is bound to disappoint the cult that has adhered to this film for more than 30 years. Nevertheless, because 'Breaking Glass' harks back to a specific point in rock history, this release gains integrity by not moving too far beyond it technically. The image quality is excellent, though it carries with pride a celluloid scar or two, and the original Dolby Digital sound mix is kept to the front speakers as it should be.

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original into account, but not to the benefit of the series: Chan is back, but his exasperated superiors caution him about all the property damage done during his crimefighting and the number of lawsuits brought against the police, and he actually does tone down the destruction, making for an oddly action-light action movie with the amiable Chan out of his depth as the story tries to turn serious.

*New Police Story*, made 16 years on, throws even more soap opera into the mix, offering a spell with Chan as a traumatised alcoholic (he gives a decent performance, having become more battered and nuanced in the interim) after a brush with a gang of cop-killing delinquent rich kids who play their crime spree as a first-person shooter game; he's then redeemed by a hero-worshipping mystery youth (Nicholas Tse). There is a lot of plot, with the villain and the sidekick having different, complicated reasons for hating cops and worshipping Chan, and a gambit that would never show up in a non-Asian movie as the hero shames the villains by summoning their parents to the site of the bank hold-up/siege they're responsible for. Directed by Benny Chan rather than the star, *New Police Story* delivers another outstanding climax, set in (and on top of) a Hong Kong convention centre with a vast display of Lego, where Chan and his nemeses have acrobatic, intense fights amid bright-coloured plastic constructions.

**Discs:** The first two films in the series have a softish, slightly video-like look, not inappropriate for their handmade feel, while the third is brighter and sharper. Special features include audio commentaries by Hong Kong cinema experts Bey Logan and Miles Wood, interviews with Jackie Chan and his collaborators, and outtake montages which extend Chan's signature end-credits assemblages of stunt bloopers and how-it-was-done behind-the-scenes shots. (KN)

## La rabbia

Pier Paolo Pasolini/Giovannino Guareschi; Italy 1963; Raro Video/Region 1 NTSC; 105 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: making-of documentary, Pasolini's 1964 short 'La mura di Sana'a', booklet of original texts and notes, trailers

**Film:** A one-of-a-kind publicity stunt of a production from the New Wave era, this rarely seen freak dared, using nothing but archival news footage and loaded narrations, to address the entire era of post-colonial politics through a left-right diptych: half of the film is Pasolini's poetic radicalism, the other Guareschi's conservative ethnocentrism. It's a fascinating train-wreck, for many reasons, and an essential spike in the era's rampant art-film experimentalism.

It began as a one-sided found-footage feature by Pasolini, famous at the time for his first two features and one notorious short (1963's *La ricotta*, part of *RoGoPaG* and censored during the editing of *La rabbia*), but then producer

Gastone Ferranti halved Pasolini's 100-minute work, reconceived the film as a political dogfight and recruited Guareschi, a cartoonist and rightwing commentator most famous for writing the Don Camillo comedies. The backstory of exactly how this happened is full of contradictory details, depending on who you listen to (in the DVD's supplemental documentary), but the end result was a mutt of a didactic feature that Pasolini, at least, disowned.

Certainly, Pasolini's first half doesn't set out to convert or convince – rather, the montage is a derisive, associative survey of Western self-indulgence (Sophia Loren on location, Queen Elizabeth's coronation, etc) and 'sub-proletariat' agonies everywhere else, from the Congo to Budapest, the lyrical narration bemoaning both the betrayal of modern communism and of imperialism in all its forms. However, re-edited by Ferranti from the longer version, Pasolini's method comes off as whimsical and inconclusive, suiting his sensibility and political temperament, while Guareschi, fully intent on making a sardonic political point and able to shape his argument in response, is both more convincing in his details (at Nuremberg, he asks where are the butchers of Katyn and Hiroshima – they're here, "but amongst the judges") and appallingly bigoted and neocon in general. He seems, for one thing, to regret the fall of colonialism, and supports the French occupation of Algeria, openly mocking as brainless and savage a Congolese tribal-costume parade celebrating that country's independence. Whereas Pasolini suggestively mourns the suffering of millions over generations, Guareschi focuses on the plight of colonial 'white people' in the present tense.

Together, the two halves of *La rabbia* (*The Anger*) do not contrast or complement, but chafe, generating the sense of an impossible film left half-undone, haunting its makers.

**Disc:** The restoration is lovely, and the accompanying documentary, by Tatti Sanguineti, is a vital companion to *La rabbia*'s many allusions, dropped stitches and ellipses. Also included are multiple trailers, some never used, aimed at different political persuasions and demographics. (MA)



## Schloss Vogelöd Worth watching for signs of Murnau's evolving language, especially the use of flashbacks and odd lurches into comedy

### Films by Alain Resnais

#### Night and Fog

France 1957; Optimum/Region 2; Certificate TBC; 32 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

#### Hiroshima mon amour

France 1959; Optimum/Region 2; Certificate TBC; 86 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

**Films:** Made 12 years after the end of World War II, *Night and Fog*, Resnais's documentary about the concentration-camp system, is deliberately dispassionate in tone, intercutting colour footage of the remnants of Auschwitz with black-and-white archive footage. For the contemporary sections, Resnais uses long tracking shots along the fences, across the latrines or along the wall side of the crematorium – elaborate camerawork that anticipates the similar tracking shots he and Sacha Vierny would use (in an entirely different context) to capture the statues, paintings and gilded corridors of *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961). Meanwhile, the use of still

photographs, music, narration and contemporary footage is strangely reminiscent of the techniques later employed by Resnais's friend Chris Marker in *La Jetée* (1962).

The imagery in *Night and Fog* has become ever more familiar as many other films (fictional and documentary) have dealt with the Holocaust, but Resnais's approach is so stark that its power hasn't abated. This utterly chilling film remains as gruesome and uncomfortable to watch as ever.

Resnais's immensely influential first feature *Hiroshima mon amour* – made two years later – is an eerie, over-determined affair which seems strangely topical given the recent nuclear disaster in Japan. Determined not to make another *Night and Fog*-style documentary, Resnais recruited Marguerite Duras to write the screenplay. He takes an intimate approach that (some might argue) risks trivialising the tragedy of Hiroshima, using the city as a backdrop to a story of lust, love, loss and memory. The formal structure is bold ("Faulkner plus Stravinsky", as Jean-Luc Godard famously put it), and there are layers of self-reflexivity: actress Emmanuelle Riva is playing... an actress who is appearing in a film about peace. Okada Eiji is the Japanese architect with whom she has a very intense affair. The voiceover used for the flashbacks to the actress's wartime affair with a Nazi soldier in a small city called Nevers adds to the film's jarring tone, as does the haunting music.

**Discs:** Both films have clean transfers but – particularly in the case of *Hiroshima mon amour*, given its influence and the amount of debate it continues to generate – it's a pity that Optimum's release comes without any supplements, unlike Criterion's bountiful edition. (GM)

### Schloss Vogelöd

FW. Murnau; Germany 1921; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region 2; Certificate PG; 81 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: 'The Language of the Shadows' documentary, booklet

**Film:** *The Haunted Castle* – the English title of this 1921 FW. Murnau film – suggests a closer precursor to the following year's *Nosferatu* than is in fact the case. Aside from a nightmare sequence offering a presentiment of Max Schreck's impossibly long talons, this is essentially a drawing-room whodunit in which a murder suspect returns to the scene of the crime to establish his innocence. No one is ever going to rank this as major Murnau, but his oldest surviving film is worth watching for signs of his still-evolving language, especially the use of flashbacks, odd lurches into comedy (the kitchen boy's revenge fantasy) and the elemental power of a raging storm as an overarching metaphor. It also offers an equally early glimpse of Olga Tschechowa, a decade before she became one of the Third Reich's biggest stars.

**Disc:** Given that the film celebrates its goth birthday this year, this is a startlingly clean print that respects Murnau's original tinting; only the lack of a Blu-ray disc prevents it rivaling last month's *Coeur fidèle*, also a Masters of Cinema release. The documentary covers Murnau's early life and career (up to 1924 and *The Finances of the Grand Duke*), while the booklet is the usual hefty effort we expect from this label, with archive essays by Charles Jameux and Lotte Eisner. (MB)

### Secret Sunshine

Lee Chang-Dong; South Korea 2007; Criterion/Region 1 NTSC; 142 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: making-of documentary, interview with the filmmaker, essay by Dennis Lim

**Film:** Lee Chang-Dong is in many ways the mash-up Cassavetes/late Bergman of the Korean New Wave, his films all revealing a natural way with melodrama, deep-dish character study and crafty, painful storytelling. *Secret Sunshine* is only Lee's fourth film (and the slow-roasting follow-up to 2002's *Oasis*), and it is, expectedly, a scorching ordeal by circumstance and emotionalism. (Between the two films, Lee was appointed as his nation's minister of culture and tourism, but held the post for only one year.)

*Secret Sunshine*'s heroine Shin-Ae (Jeon Do-Yeon), a not-terribly-pretty young mother and widow, relocates to her dead husband's eponymous village, for obscure and perhaps only whimsical reasons. The reserved and introverted Shin-Ae instantly attracts unwanted attention in town, both cool (gossipy neighbours) and warm (the men, including congenial mechanic Song Kang-Ho), as she attends to her brat of a primary-school son and sets up a storefront piano school. The tepid percolation of the story explodes when the boy is kidnapped and then soon found dead. Shin-Ae is thereby launched



Hong Kong's finest: Jackie Chan in 'New Police Story'

## NEW RELEASES

into the harrowing throes of grief catatonia, desperate Christian conversion, levelling disillusionment (she decides to 'forgive' the imprisoned killer in person, a scene that unleashes ex-novelist's Lee's sharpest blades of irony) and scattered self-destruction.

Shot and staged at a medium distance (we never get close enough to Shin-Ae to 'comfortably' share her pain, or know exactly how to react to her), the movie is almost analytical in its view of its molten protagonist (Jeon won a best actress trophy at Cannes for what is an unrelentingly tortured performance), but it's inconclusive – look under the angst and tribulation, and the lengthy scenario scans like a wrestle with the idea of God, with no certain winner.

**Disc:** Criterion-standard transfer, with an easy-to-appreciate suite of standard extras. Dennis Lim's typically adroit essay is particularly rich in cultural-background details. (MA)

**Strigoi**

Faye Jackson; UK 2009; Eureka/Bounty Films/Region 2; Certificate 15; 101 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 anamorphic; Features: trailer, 'Lump' short film

**Film:** It's a refreshing change to see a vampire film drawn from authentic Romanian folklore as opposed to the bastardised Bram Stoker version – and also to see a British horror film trying something new: here, the vampires (or *strigoi*) return from their graves to raid their victims' kitchens and fridges before adopting the more traditional neck-biting posture. The film also wittily fuses ancient village legends to more recent communist land-grabs: the vampirism arises as a by-product of a feud between a hated landowner and the villagers he's exploited. On the debit side, it's overlong, awkwardly paced and its entirely Romanian cast speak strongly accented English, muffling some of the intentional humour and adding too much of the unintentional kind. Director Faye Jackson claims that her lack of Romanian dictated this, but fellow expat Peter Strickland didn't speak Hungarian when he made the far more controlled *Katalin Varga* at around the same time. Still, a promising debut.

**Blind passion: 'The Woman on the Beach'**



## Secret Sunshine A scorching ordeal by circumstance and emotionalism... like a wrestle with the idea of God, with no certain winner

**Disc:** The transfer is fine, but the only significant extra is Jackson's short film *Lump* (2006), an effectively nasty Cronenbergian nightmare about breast surgery. (MB)

### The Warped World of Koreyoshi Kurahara

**Intimidation/The Warped Ones/I Hate But Love/Black Sun/Thirst for Love**

Koreyoshi Kurahara; Japan 1960/60/62/64/67; Criterion/Region 1 NTSC; 65/75/105/95/99 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: essays

**Films:** One of the neglected captains of the Japanese New Wave, receiving few Western releases in his day and rarely considered since, Kurahara appears emblematic of the wave's craziest, most overheated impulses, while occupying a distinctive kind of middle ground between the psychotic genre frenzies of Suzuki Seijun and the artsier, more Godardian extremities of Oshima Nagisa. He was, for most of the 1960s, a faithful and catholic Nikkatsu journeyman, always racily commercial in the peak days of cinematic risk, and happy to secrete his ubiquitous class-war unease within rousing formula packages.

Formally, Kurahara's films are chronically restless, abruptly jolting into free-frame montages, struck with lightning-like quick-cut visions of chaos and overcome with handheld camera swoopings. This Criterion set, supplemented only with essays by the estimable Chuck Stephens, gives us Kurahara's first act, which came after a few years of apprentice work and studio assignments; come the 1970s and 1980s, he evolved into a popular director of blockbusters, globetrotting adventure sagas (including 1983's *Antarctica*) and sundry detours.

His first serious New Wave entry and often called the first Japanese *noir*, *Intimidation* is a 65-minute dirty

diamond of secrets and betrayals, in which a pair of provincial banking buddies – one an idiot office lackey, the other a promoted schemer – face off in artichoke-heart layers of deviousness that involve a blackmailing scheme, an aborted bank robbery and a lingering bitterness over a stolen woman. The set's other entries are more ambitious. The Technicolor *I Hate But Love* stars Japanese mega-idol Ishihara Yujiro as a TV celebrity impulsively road-tripping to a remote village with his lovelorn manager in tow, while the discombobulating *Black Sun* boils down to the viscous, red-hot mess between a jazz-intoxicated teen hoodlum, squatting with a dog named Thelonious Monk in a bomb-shattered church belltower, and a black American GI with a bullet in his leg and a warrant out for his arrest. Scored by bandleader Max Roach, the film eventually goes off the grid, with a delirious, blackface-whiteface journey through a wasteland Japan that ends only at the edge of a polluted sea. Comparatively, *Thirst for Love*, from a Mishima Yukio novel, is a seething and outrageously perverse melodrama in which a young widow quietly destroys her dead husband's wealthy family from the inside out.

*The Warped Ones*, however, made immediately after *Intimidation*, is the filmography's yowling, seizure-inducing quasi-masterpiece, a post-'sun tribe' proto-punk youth anthem which fully dopes on jazz, crime, meaningless sex, driving shirtless and sociopathic nihilism to a fetishistic degree that makes other nose-thumbing New Wave testaments seem positively civil by comparison. More a living, style-dizzy document of generational disgust than a sensible narrative, and released in the US in 1963 as *The Weird Love Makers*, Kurahara's movie survives as a hilarious, noble gesture of antisocial fire – the equivalent of a three-minute

punk song. One can well envy Japanese teenagers for having a film like this on the cusp of the 1960s.

**Discs:** Beautiful restorations and transfers, and Stephens's background essays are, predictably, deeply informed, quotable and rousing. (MA)

**White Line Fever**

Jonathan Kaplan; US 1975; Warner Archive/Region 0; 90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

**Film:** Perhaps more than any other figure, the lorry driver has symbolised the embattled working man – the proletariat, if you prefer. This is true of Cy Endfield's *Hell Drivers* (1957), true even in abstract cases like Marguerite Duras's *Le Camion* (1977), and true certainly in the annals of the American trucking movie, from the 1940s leftism of ex-driver A.I. 'Buzz' Bezzzerides's scripts (*They Drive by Night*, *Thieves' Highway*) to the libertarian bent of the 1970s CB-radio/trucksplotation boom.

Jonathan Kaplan's diesel-power classic is the most bomb-throwing entry of that era ('white line fever' means autopilot long-haul driving – Merle Haggard had a minor hit with a song of the same title in 1969). Jan-Michael Vincent, an actor of vigorous, compact physicality and working-class cred, stars as Carrol Jo Hummer, freshly returned to hometown Tucson from Vietnam. After putting a down-payment on an articulated lorry, Carrol Jo discovers that there's no work for drivers who refuse to carry contraband since Buck Wessle (L.Q. Jones, a horny goat in skin-tight polyester) started running the industry for the benefit of corporate overlords who violently suppress any insubordination.

Carrol Jo's refusal to carry untaxed cigarettes and slot machines would seem to put him at odds with the classic rebel outlaw-driver of *Thunder Road* (1958) – an independent owner-operator ('Gotta operate to own'), he has to go to war with the syndicate to make an honest living. But Kaplan and Ken Friedman's script collectively indicts crooks, corporations and local government as part of one big glad-hand, back-pat conspiracy against the working man. (Kaplan subsequently directed another wholesale rebellion against the domesticated West, 1979's *Over the Edge*.)

*White Line Fever* is an exemplar of 1970s location shooting. Carrol Jo carries a Salt Lake City load across a sequence of long-shot vistas, a montage communicating the road's lure – and a fresh breath from the ceiling-tiled, wood-panel back offices stagnant with corruption. The casting never compromises the scenery's verisimilitude, with an excellent Kay Lenz lending her flat-mouthed pout to Carrol Jo's wife, and supporting work from Sam Laws and Slim Pickens, seamless among cast-on-location faces. By firmly planting his story in blue-collar reality, Kaplan finds the traction to lift it into tall-tale territory.

**Disc:** Warners On-Demand – it looks good, plays and stops at that. The Warner Archive website doesn't ship

directly to the UK, but you can order On-Demand releases though sites such as Amazon and Movies Unlimited. (NP)

### The Woman on the Beach

Jean Renoir; US 1947; Warner Archive On-Demand; 71 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

**Film:** *The Woman on the Beach* marked the departure of one legend from Hollywood and the arrival of another. After the film's quiet box-office death, Jean Renoir decamped to India to make *The River*. Meanwhile star Robert Ryan, nursed towards leading-man status by RKO since 1943, was about to break big in *Crossfire* – but *Woman* introduced the sort of lacerated performance he would become known for.

He plays Lieutenant Scott Brunnet, stationed with the Coast Guard on the remote Atlantic seaboard. He is first seen thrashing in his bunk, in the grip of a nightmare into which the viewer is whirlpool-sucked: tendrils of sea foam, sinking ships, slow-falling bodies, then Ryan walking across the ocean floor and a carpet of human bones towards a woman in a white gown that waves like kelp. The pure expressionism recalls Renoir's *The Little Match Girl* made 20 years earlier, and sets the scene for a film with much of the fairytale about it.

When Ryan jolts awake, his howl to a concerned supervisor defines his roles for the decades to come: "Let's face it: I'm not well!" Brunnet is skittishly engaged to an apple-cheeked, tomboyish townie (Nan Leslie), but a chance encounter with a dolorous brunette named Peggy (Joan Bennett) puts the hook in him, and soon he's a third party in the sadomasochistic domestic tug-of-war that Peggy keeps going with her husband Tod (Charles Bickford), an ex-painter whom she blinded in a drunken donnybrook and who has since enslaved her with guilt. Peggy and Brunnet rendezvous in the hulk of a beached ship; Tod 'befriends' Brunnet with an aggressive amiability contradicted by his voice's hard edge; and Brunnet develops the *idée fixe* that Tod is faking his affliction.

Machete-edited by the studio, *The Woman on the Beach* feels cut to the bone at 71 minutes. There are several scenes that, while potent, rear up too abruptly to feel properly motivated. And yet a wreck can be more impressive than a seaworthy vessel. Ryan's trauma remains vague, likewise the film's resolution, which recedes into the ubiquitous fog. What comes through with clarity, though, is a sensitively acted triangle, a depiction of people in love with their own unhappiness, and the reflection of it they find in one another.

**Disc:** Not an extra in sight, but the image quality is a quantum leap over the 2006 Editions Montparnasse release. (NP)

**This month's releases reviewed by Sergio Angelini, Michael Atkinson, Michael Brooke, Geoffrey Macnab, Kim Newman, Nick Pinkerton and Kate Stables**

### The Strange World of Gurney Slade

ATV/ITV; UK 1960; Network DVD/Region 2; Certificate PG; 161 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: advertising promos, image gallery

**Programme:** ITV was barely five years old when *The Strange World of Gurney Slade* hit the airways, yet there is already a decidedly *fin de siècle* (or at the very least end-of-term) feel to this freewheeling and self-consciously surreal comedy as it tries, ever so hard, to refresh the parts other television shows didn't even know existed.

Writers Sid Green and Dick Hills shaped the series as a vehicle for star Anthony Newley, and it opens with him walking off the set and out into the 'real' world, where he sings, dances, tells tall tales to children, ruminates on the nature of existence with inanimate objects, and communes with nature. For the first three episodes Gurney's break for freedom is set entirely outdoors, taking him from the streets of London to the countryside via a disused airfield where we eventually find him after a lengthy tracking shot. ("Took you long enough to get here," he quips laconically.)

Physical locations are largely irrelevant, though, as this is a show that mostly takes place inside our protagonist's head as he debates chat-up techniques with the likes of Anneke Wills and Una Stubbs, worries about the finances of the nation and investigates milk production with a cow voiced by Fenella Fielding ("How would you like your lactic glands stuffed into a vacuum cleaner?"). This particular brand of gentle whimsy and featherweight social commentary – recognisable in subsequent Newley projects such as *Stop the World I Want to Get Off* (1966) and *Can Heironymus Merkin Ever Forget Mercy Humppe and Find True Happiness?* (1969) – works even better in the later episodes, which relocate to the more artificial confines of the studio. As the show itself is put on trial and Gurney's mind is invaded by children and partygoers, so a more overtly carnivalesque atmosphere takes over. If Lewis Carroll has been the main inspiration thus far, the sixth and final instalment plays more like a 25-minute reduction of Luigi Pirandello's avant-garde classic *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, as the supporting cast round on Slade, demanding he flesh out their roles so that they can continue to exist beyond the end of the series. Reality eventually comes knocking in the shape of 'Anthony Newley', who carts a simulacrum of Slade away with him as the titles roll over Max Harris's infectious theme tune. It's an appropriately surreal and even slightly creepy final curtain for a curio of a show which, while always more amusing than funny, was never less than smart.

**Disc:** Shot in black and white on 35mm, this first-rate transfer to DVD



## The Strange World of Gurney Slade

This freewheeling comedy tries, ever so hard, to refresh the parts other TV shows didn't even know existed

is pin-sharp and absolutely spotless. Extras include some amusing advertising promos with Newley deprecating his own show ("I don't know what it's about and I'm in it. They won't watch it anyway"). (SA)

### The Twilight Zone – Season 1

Cayuga/CBS; US 1959-60; Fremantle Home Entertainment/Blu-ray Region B; Certificate PG; 1,850 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: audio commentaries, video interviews, audio interviews, Rod Serling audio lectures, isolated music scores, radio dramas, episodes of 'Desilu Playhouse' and 'Tales of Tomorrow', Rod Serling promos, alternate version of pilot

**Programme:** In Richard Matheson's 'A World of Difference', one of many lesser-known delights in this eye-opening reissue of a home-video perennial, there is an inversion of *The Strange World of Gurney Slade*, as a businessman's world collapses when he realises that his life is a fiction and that he is just an actor in a TV show. Real life frequently proves hostile and threatening in this classic American anthology, its many heartfelt studies of loneliness and alienation (especially those in which incarnations of fate, death and even the devil make guest appearances) containing the cream of creator/producer/narrator Rod Serling's writing for the show.

There is much to rediscover here, such as the haunting original theme tune by Bernard Herrmann rather than

the more familiar ditty by Marius Constant which was used only subsequently. Science-fiction gimmicks are surprisingly eschewed in favour of fantasy – something that's emphasised by the inclusion of an adaptation of Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore's 'What You Need' for the *Tales of Tomorrow* series, showing how Serling's later version strips the story of all its SF trappings. In addition, this sumptuously produced set restores Serling's promos for the following week's episode (although always the narrator, he only appears on screen in the episodes from subsequent seasons). Given an impeccable presentation and a wealth of supporting material and commentary of genuine interest, even the most familiar of stories still offers much to amuse, chill and impress. This is easily the finest TV release of the year.

**Discs:** Image and sound are beautifully rendered on Blu-ray. The bounty of extras is highly rewarding, ranging from 'The Time Element', the one-hour time-travel drama that led Serling to launch *The Twilight Zone*, to dozens of audio and video interviews as well commentaries from the likes of Martin Landau, Kevin McCarthy and Rod Taylor (some episodes have as many as three commentary tracks) and isolated music scores foregrounding the contributions of such master composers as Herrmann, Franz Waxman and Jerry Goldsmith. (SA)

# In the dark about evil

A new book on 1970s horror mixes old chestnuts with fresh insights, says **Nick Pinkerton**

## Shock Value: How a Few Eccentric Outsiders Gave Us Nightmares, Conquered Hollywood, and Invented Modern Horror

By Jason Zinoman, Penguin Press, 272pp, \$25.95, ISBN 9781594203022

In the introduction to *'Shock Value'*, a survey of shifting tropes in American horror films, Jason Zinoman asserts that "in the 1960s, going to see a horror movie was barely more respectable than visiting a porn theatre." Today, Zinoman's handsome hardback marks another step in the domestication of the never-more-popular genre. *'Shock Value'* examines the watershed in horror's crossover, roughly 1968 to 1979. The big-money titles discussed at length will be familiar even to a reader indifferent to scary movies: *'Rosemary's Baby'* (1968), *'Night of the Living Dead'* (1968), *'The Last House on the Left'* (1972), *'The Texas Chain Saw Massacre'* (1974), *'Carrie'* (1976), *'Halloween'* (1978), *'Alien'* (1979).

For Zinoman, these are the essential texts of what he dubs "New Horror", defined by their appeal to adults and "their embrace of ambiguity of motivation and morality, the resistance of neat resolutions and happy endings, and the blurring of lines between dream and reality". The unwillingness to ascribe motive is an especial preoccupation: a chapter called "The Problem with *Psycho*" refers to the closing monologue by Simon Oakland's psychiatrist in Hitchcock's film, which explains away the madness of Norman Bates – a typically "Old Horror" retreat. Peter Bogdanovich's 1968 *'Targets'*, in contrast, offers no motives to its sniper-killer; for Zinoman, the critics who protested "missed what became one of the most important philosophical ideas of the decade in horror films. Being in the dark about evil: that is the real horror."

New Horror's eschewal of explanations is variously traced to the influence of H.P. Lovecraft's "ineffable" accounts of his "things that cannot be described" and – rather more left-field – to the contemporary theatre. Zinoman asserts that "the impact of stage drama on the great directors of scary movies of the sixties and seventies remains vastly underrated", and sets out to correct this by "overrating" it. One senses that Zinoman, principally a theatre critic, is trying to lure his subject into familiar territory, although he often connects the dots fairly convincingly, positing that John Carpenter was "influenced by the terror of Samuel Beckett" in creating the mute, numb Michael Myers of *'Halloween'*, wanting "an empty space at the heart of the movie, where the answers usually



Motiveless killing: Zinoman identifies Bogdanovich's 1968 *'Targets'* as a landmark

are". "Pinter's key insight," offers William Friedkin – who directed his 1968 film of the British playwright's *'The Birthday Party'* before making *'The Exorcist'* (1973) – "is the virtue of not explaining away the mystery of a scene."

Friedkin's film of *'The Birthday Party'* was made for horror studio Amicus (though this goes unmentioned upon here). Despite finding room for several lurching digressions, *'Shock Value'* will perhaps be noted by genre partisans mostly for what it fails to mention. Conspicuously absent from Zinoman's attempt to tie the horror film to the theatre is patron saint Antonin Artaud. Nowhere does the author attempt to contrast changing attitudes towards psychology and motivation in other contemporary film genres or the culture at large, while pre-1968 horror is given the same sort of total brush-off usually assigned to the pre-punk 1970s. Vincent Price is dispensed with as a cartoonish relic, with no mention of *'Witchfinder General'* (1968), while UK horror as a whole is summarised by Hammer in its dotage. The contemporary Italians are given cursory treatment, with only Bava and Argento namechecked.

Even the prehistory of American horror becomes indistinct beyond the 1950s, with Tod Browning a persona non grata and Val Lewton limited to a single paragraph. In passing, it should be mentioned that Zinoman's prose is often rather first-draft: when he describes Lovecraft's "atmosphere" as "murky and hard to decipher as a foggy sky in

**Essential texts of New Horror are defined by their embrace of ambiguity**

Scotland", one wonders which nation's skies the author finds most articulate.

The obvious models for Zinoman's book – at least to the mind of whoever slapped the subtitle *'How a Few Eccentric Outsiders Gave Us Nightmares... etc'* – on the dust-jacket – are Peter Biskind's dishy insider tomes, notably *'Easy Riders, Raging Bulls'*. Zinoman's production histories, achieved through much primary research, are the most interesting material here. The author acknowledges the "clash of visions" that complicates even the most auteur-driven productions, and is good at detailing the unlikely alliances that get films made: 'ballyhoo' director-turned-producer William Castle and Roman Polanski on *'Rosemary's Baby'*; Catholic novelist William Peter Blatty and skeptic Friedkin on *'The Exorcist'*. He also deftly captures on-set atmosphere, like the *'Chain Saw'* shoot in central Texas summertime, crusty with Karo corn syrup.

Also worthy are Zinoman's biographical sketches, including intimate analyses of Brian De Palma and that old hack Wes Craven, and an evocation of the University of Southern California film school in the late 1960s, where John Carpenter of Kentucky and Dan O'Bannon of Missouri met and fused their mutual comic-book/creature-feature interests on their student project-turned-debut *'Dark Star'* (1970-74). Zinoman affectionately reclaims O'Bannon for posterity: an active though peripheral figure in science-fiction/horror filmmaking, and one of the architects of the scripts for *'Alien'* and *'Total Recall'* (1990), who died of Crohn's disease in 2009. If Zinoman's eulogy for O'Bannon somewhat arbitrarily makes him into the soul of a movement, it is also the author's most welcome departure from a beaten path.

## Dream Repairman: Adventures in Film Editing

By Jim Clark with John H. Myers, LandMarc Press, 311pp, £16, ISBN 9780979718496

Film editors sometimes go on to become famous directors (David Lean, for one), but they seldom attain fame in their own right, except occasionally when their work is linked with that of a star auteur – Thelma Schoonmaker with Martin Scorsese, or Walter Murch with Francis Coppola. I first came across the name Jim Clark in 2008, when I was told that a feature I'd scripted, which had been languishing on the shelf for a year, had been rescued by an incisive new cut by "the guy who did *Marathon Man*". I duly consulted IMDb, where I learned that Clark, the man in question, had edited key British movies from *The Innocents* (1961) via *The Killing Fields* (1984, which won him an Oscar) to *Vera Drake* (2004). And since the salvage job he did on our film, *Good*, was uncredited, it was clear that the 40 films listed on IMDb represented the tip of the iceberg.

*Good* turned out to be the last film Clark cut; he retired the same year, over half a century after starting out as a trainee in the cutting room at Ealing. He has now written his memoirs, full of wry anecdotes about his working relationships with British film notables, including the tantrum-prone John Schlesinger, the anxious Mike Leigh, and David Puttnam, who took Clark to Hollywood with him during his ill-fated stint running Columbia in the late 1980s. "In spite of my sophisticated title as a Columbia executive," Clark writes with typical frankness, "my real job was studio mortician... Though I couldn't bring [the films] to life, I could touch up the corpse."

Unlike Murch in *The Conversations*, Clark doesn't go in for elaborate theories about montage; the keys to his craft, he insists, are simply "instinct and a lot of experimentation". But along the way, he provides fascinating insights into the mechanics of editing, not least the challenge of piecing together the conversion scene in *The Mission* (1986) from almost 60 ten-minute reels of takes, during which Jeremy Irons's performance never wavered, but Robert De Niro's was never the same twice.

John Wrathall



Inexhaustible: De Niro in *'The Mission'*

LEFT STILL, POSTERS AND DESIGNS (C)

## Victim

By John Coldstream, BFI/Palgrave  
Macmillan, 120pp, £9.99,  
ISBN 9781844574278

Although it's now 50 years old, *Victim* (1961) portrays a London that's still recognisable today. Stand outside Angel's costume shop on Shaftesbury Avenue and you're on roughly the spot from which Dirk Bogarde, as barrister Melville Farr, crossed into Earlham Street ("Harbourne Street" in the film) while investigating a blackmail plot aimed at gay men. That exterior shot, with its view down to Cambridge Circus and the Palace Theatre, is wonderfully evocative of a West End evening, then and now. Attention to the director Basil Dearden's use of real locations (including that one-time hub of gay life, the Salisbury pub on Saint Martin's Lane) is only one of the merits of John Coldstream's meticulous study of the small-scale thriller that, by challenging British legal attitudes to homosexuality, was "punching way above its weight".

As Bogarde's official biographer (as well as editor of volumes of his journalism and letters), Coldstream is perfectly placed to assess the film's importance in the actor's career. *Victim* is remembered as Bogarde's breakthrough into serious roles, so it's surprising to learn that he was not the first choice for the lead. Jack Hawkins, wisely, could not see himself in the part; James Mason and, mercifully, Stewart Granger were unavailable.

Casting the younger Bogarde alongside the quietly sensual Sylvia



Moment of truth: Laura (Sylvia Syms, left) demands to know the secret of her husband Melville (Dirk Bogarde, right) in 'Victim'

Syms as his wife Laura raised the sexual temperature of the story considerably. In the film's key scene, Laura demands to know the truth about her husband's relationship with the young building-site worker (Peter McEnery) whose death in police custody has forced Farr to risk his career in an attempt to foil the blackmail plot of which he himself has fallen victim. If the film hedges its bets by making Farr's homosexuality no more than latent, Bogarde's own rewriting of this key scene ("You won't be content until you know, will you? Till you've ripped it out of me. I stopped

seeing him because I wanted him") is admirably direct, while the claustrophobic lighting (by Otto Heller) heightens the sense of Farr as a cornered animal. Bogarde and Syms play the scene with superb economy and truth.

Coldstream's choice of stills is exemplary and he augments them with pages from Bogarde's own working script, featuring not only his rewrites (showing how skilfully he increased the emotional level of the original dialogue by Janet Green and John McCormick) but also the "emotional graph" he wrote for his character. *Death in Venice* (1971)

apart, Bogarde kept the closet door firmly closed after *Victim*, but he must have known that the film contained his moment of truth, liberating him to produce ever more impressive work. Coldstream's book also provides convincing evidence that *Victim* was instrumental in an even greater liberation. Lord Arran, whose bill eventually led to the 1967 legal reform on homosexuality, praised *Victim* in a letter to Bogarde, concluding: "It is comforting to think that perhaps a million men are no longer living in fear." **Paul Ryan**

## Forgotten Futures: British Municipal Cinema 1920-1980

By Elizabeth Lebas, Black Dog Publishing,  
192pp, £24.95, ISBN 9781906155940

Abetted by its digital technologies, our young century is proving a golden age for rediscovery of non-fiction films produced (but neglected) in the analogue century preceding it. A giant jigsaw picture of 'forgotten' films, filmmakers and entire genres is gradually emerging. *Forgotten Futures* adds a significant piece to the puzzle.

The title refers to the 300 or so films commissioned by local government in Britain between 1920 and 1980. It also implies the ideology and structures from which they emerged and of which they speak. What Elizabeth Lebas terms "the local state and its civil society" were, respectively, the producers and audiences of these films – which, she implies, may help redress political historians' disproportionate fixation with the nation state.

Anyone picking up *Forgotten Futures* will be struck, instantly, by its supremely handsome production values, which surely required considerable subsidy. This is more than just a matter of style; many printed histories and commentaries on archival non-fiction (including minor classics by authors as varied as Rachael Low, Bert



Roots: dental-health education in 1927

Hogenkamp and Brian Winston) are sparsely or grainily illustrated, if at all. Though its subject is yet more esoteric, *Forgotten Futures* feels less like those volumes than a Thames & Hudson or Taschen coffee-table book, or a Tate exhibition catalogue. Glossy, large-format paper and excellent design showcase numerous well-chosen stills, including colour ones. Thus a strong case for the fascination of these films – and their (often accidental) beauty – is immediately made, and readers will be that much more likely to want to progress to close reading of the text.

Lebas's well-structured study begins by placing municipal cinema in the

parallel evolutions of film appreciation, pedagogy and above all local government itself, invoking widened conceptions of citizenship linked to universal enfranchisement. She then conceptualises and categorises the filmmaking that resulted, introducing three key genres: commemorative, persuasive and promotional works. Then, at the heart of the book, comes close study of the two major cases of systematic, long-term local-authority sponsorship: Bermondsey and Glasgow. A filmography rounds things off.

The great strengths of Lebas's account are her confident contextualisation of the films' political project, her trustworthy grasp of the legislative background and above all the rich local details she has unearthed about the people who made them – and how and by whom they were seen. It's always preferable that the first major work on any neglected filmmaking should rest on sound empirical research; should the theorists arrive subsequently, they then have proven facts with which to work.

On the debit side, Lebas is relatively weaker on style and technology. A worryingly basic error is her assertion that almost all municipal films were made on 16mm, though a fair number were produced on 35mm (even if 16mm

may have been the main distribution medium). One slight irritation is her very occasional (and mild) tendency to self-valorisation for having discovered and tilled a field ignored by others; it's also unnecessary, as the quality of her research makes the case in itself. However, this feels less like academic egotism than the flipside to her contagious zeal for her subject.

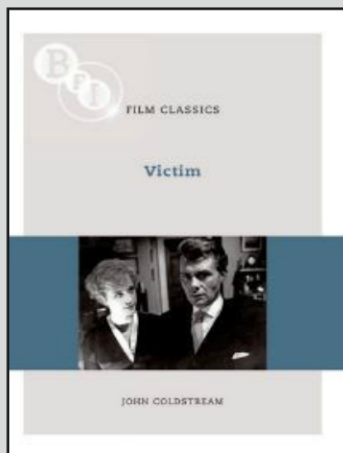
At heart, *Forgotten Futures*' commitment is to education in its broadest sense, characterised by reliable information delivered with impassioned enthusiasm. Lebas finds that combination in the best municipal films, and she exemplifies it herself in the choice of words and pictures for her book. True, it begs the question whether so lavish a labour of love, applied to a relatively small body of work, is excessive. But this publication should hopefully serve to inspire comparable treatment of larger-scale bodies of 'forgotten' filmmaking: the charity film, the classroom film, cinema advertising and home movies all come to mind (alongside the industrial film, already emerging from obscurity). Lebas and her publishers deserve congratulation for a project, brave to the point of foolhardy, that may yet transform the market.

**Patrick Russell**

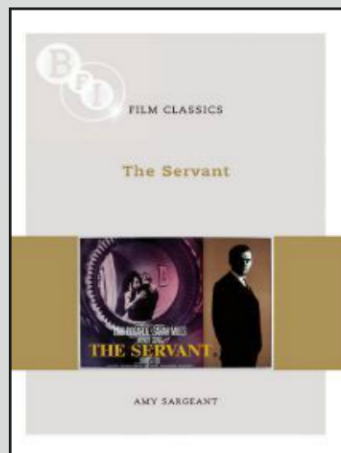
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Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN  
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Email: [S&S@bfi.org.uk](mailto:S&S@bfi.org.uk)

## Digital or bust

How dispiriting to read the thoughts of the director of programming of one of our major arthouse groups on the digital vs 35mm debate (Letters, *S&S*, September). Yes, we all know it comes down to economics in the end, but a few words of regret and an acknowledgement of something important being lost are surely to be expected from someone in Jason Wood's position. The fact that most films at the Renai this year have been shown digitally is no consolation. The 'diversity' Wood proudly proclaims is in fact rapidly becoming a digital monoculture. Of course, we're a captive audience, and if there's no alternative we'll all see a film in imperfect conditions rather than not at all.

**Sheila Seacroft**  
Durham

## Jewel in Crowne

I was interested to read Jo Rolliver's thoughts on *Larry Crowne* and the reference to "half a joke" in my review (Letters, *S&S*, September). The paragraph in question was analysing the character of Mercedes (Julia Roberts) and that brief line was included to demonstrate her cynical sense of humour. I'm sure Jo's right that the following line in the movie is "supposedly funny", but I found it less amusing than Mercedes's curt put-down. Had I set out to list all the successful jokes in *Larry Crowne*, it would have been a short review indeed!

**Anna Smith**  
By email

## Bad company

So you have decided that you do not have space for music credits or even full cast lists to accompany film reviews, yet you apparently have unlimited space available to list all the production companies. Your credits for *The Tree* (Reviews, *S&S*, September) occupied 15 column inches, of which over eight consisted of the full list of companies and

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Digital domain

Nicholas Sutton's letter (*S&S*, August) – written to correct an error – ironically highlights his own misunderstanding of the digital filmmaking process. Whilst many films are indeed still shot on 35mm, they are almost all, without fail, processed digitally: by which I mean that the negative is scanned at high resolution and colour-corrected by the director and cinematographer, in the digital realm. This digital 'intermediate' is then either exported for digital projection, or else shot out on to film negative, from which the 35mm prints that Mr Sutton fetishises are produced.

It's certainly a matter of taste whether one prefers 35mm projection or digital projection, but it's ridiculous to claim that grain fluctuation is removed, and a "sterile flatness" is always the result: watch the current digital projection of *The Tree of Life* (pictured) to see the original fine grain left intact in the image. Any additional 35mm print grain is, to my mind, one of the unwelcome factors of 35mm projection that I am happy to leave behind – along with accumulated dirt, lack of clarity and focus through



shoddy bulk processing and/or inept or careless projection, and the gradual physical decay of the print to a severely compromised state.

I remember my first screening of *McCabe & Mrs Miller* back in 1991, on a ruined 35mm print which exhibited

a great deal of "entropy", as Mr Sutton generously terms it – and I'm happy for future generations that today's films (and ideally yesterday's) can be preserved in a kinder form.

**Matthew McKinnon**  
London

organisations involved in the production. How many of your readers do you think want that information? On the other hand, how many of your readers do you think come home from a film wanting to know the identity of a familiar face in a minor role, or the title and performer of a song on the soundtrack, because their view of the credits was obstructed? Your priorities are wrong.

**Dave Howell**  
By email

**Editor's note:** *The decision to run fewer credits was dictated not by lack of space, but by staff reductions in the BFI's filmographic unit. See Editorial, S&S, May*

### German, not Polish

Whilst I've always thought that the general *S&S* readership is a better-educated bunch than most, there are still those in the world today who will misconstrue the opening line of Kim Newman's excellent *X-Men: First Class* review: "A Polish concentration camp, 1944" (*S&S*, August). It's an unfortunate phrasing that for decades has been commonplace, but that is now being actively fought against by Polish journalists and historians alike, the more so since we joined Europe and finally began properly exploring our neighbours' worlds. Please try to remember that the adjective 'Polish' with 'concentration camp' is entirely incorrect and misleading. There were no such camps – rather there were German concentration camps in Poland.

**Jim Bard**  
Kraków, Poland

### Shades of Dirk

I read with interest your article on Dirk Bogarde ('A Class Act', *S&S*, September). The actor John Fraser, who appeared with Bogarde in *The Wind Cannot Read*, throws some light on the older actor's sexuality in his autobiography. During a visit, he asked Bogarde what he did about sex, and was taken up to an attic where a motorcycle stood in front of a large poster from *The Singer Not the Song*, in which Bogarde is clad in black leather. The indication was that Bogarde required no stimulation other than himself – and was, in fact, a narcissist.

**Keverne Weston**  
By email

I would like to add another title to the fine survey of Dirk Bogarde's career (*S&S*, September): Jack Clayton's underrated gem *Our Mother's House*. It was typical of Bogarde at this stage of his career to take a reduced salary to appear in an offbeat film he believed in. In other hands, the character of Charlie Hook could have come over as an unscrupulous opportunist; without sentimentalising the role, Bogarde also makes him bemused, vulnerable and likeable. The pay-off for the actor came when the film was seen at the Venice Festival by Luchino Visconti. The rest, as they say, is history. When will this remarkable film appear on DVD?

**Neil Sinyard**  
Hull University

### The stroke of midnight

In his review of *When Movies Mattered* (Books, *S&S*, September) Philip French

recalls a film programmer from the Chicago Art Institute telling him in the early 1990s of the near impossibility of attracting audiences to subtitled films. It may not be subtitled, but *Chimes at Midnight* was given a special one-off outing on August 1 at Edinburgh's Cameo Cinema – to an audience of no more than 20 people.

**Grahame Smith**  
Gargunnock, Stirling

### Lyric Poetry

According to your synopsis of Lee Chang-Dong's *Poetry* (Reviews, *S&S*, August), the main character, the grandmother, commits suicide at the end. My reading is that, once she has turned her grandson over to the police, she has seen true justice done and the memory of the wronged girl has been honoured. The grandmother has found internal peace and is not suicidal. Am I wrong?

**Michael Bailey**  
Edinburgh

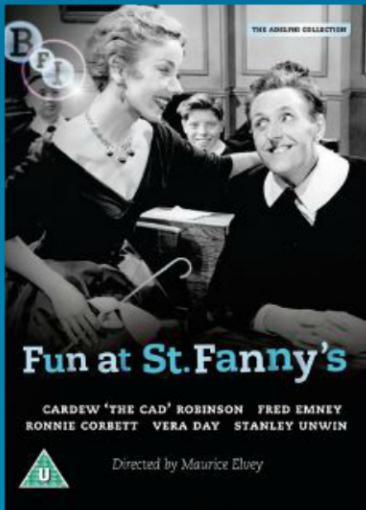
### Additions & corrections

**September** p.54 *Arriety*: Voice cast given was for the US release. UK release voice cast: Saoirse Ronan (*Arriety*), Tom Holland (*Sho*), Olivia Colman (*Homily*), Mark Strong (*Pod*), Luke Allen-Gale (*Spiller*); p.60 *The Devil's Double*, Cert 18, 108m 16s, 9,744 ft +0 frames; p.63 *The Hedgehog*, Cert 12A, 99m 26s, 8,949 ft +1 frame; p.64 *Horrid Henry The Movie*, Cert U, 92m 43s, 8,344 ft +8 frames; p.66 *In a Better World*, Cert 15, 117m 44s, 10,596 ft +7 frames; p.66 *The Interrupters*, Cert 15, 127m 45s, 11,497 ft +8 frames; p.67 *Kill List*, Cert 18, 95m 28s, 8,592 ft +0 frames; p.68 *Knuckle*, Cert 15, 96m 39s, 8,698 ft +8 frames; p.72 *Powder*, Cert 15, 104m 55s, 9,442 ft +8 frames; p.73 *The Referees* Cert 15, 80m 39s, 7,258 ft +8 frames

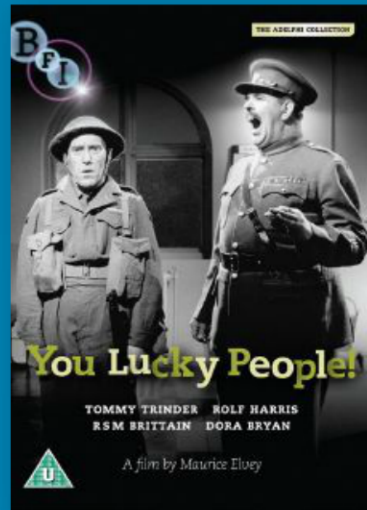
Dirk wears leather trousers: 'The Singer Not the Song'



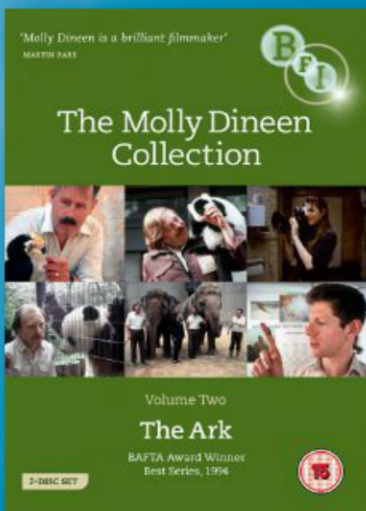
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